United Nations S/PV.7908

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7908th meeting
Friday, 24 March 2017, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Moustafa
	Ethiopia	Mr. Woldegerima
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-07840 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: Today, on behalf of the Secretary-General, I would like to devote my regular briefing to the Council on the situation in the Middle East to reporting on the implementation of resolution 2334 (2016). In this first report, I will focus on developments on the ground, in accordance with the provisions of the resolution, including on regional and international efforts to advocate and advance the peace process.

Let me note from the outset that none of the developments on the ground can be divorced from the broader context in which they are happening — namely, the stalled peace process, the lack of dialogue between the parties and the increased radicalization on all sides. The reporting period witnessed a notable increase in statements, announcements and decisions related to settlement construction and expansion.

Resolution 2334 (2016) calls on Israel to take steps to "cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem". No such steps were taken during the reporting period. In January, two major announcements were made for a total of 5,500 housing units in settlements in Area C of the occupied West Bank. Within three weeks, some 3,000 housing units were advanced through the various stages of the planning process and over 240 units reached the final approval stage. Separately, tenders for some 800 housing units were issued. Eighty per cent of the 4,000 settlement moves during the reporting period were concentrated in and around major Israeli population centres close to the 1967 line, while some 20 per cent were in outlying locations deep inside the occupied West Bank.

Let me reiterate that the United Nations considers all settlement activities to be illegal under international law and one of the main obstacles to peace. On 1 February, the Government announced its intention to establish a new settlement for the residents of the illegal Amona outpost, following its demolition by order of the Israeli High Court of Justice on 2 February. While there was no advancement of settlement plans in occupied East Jerusalem during the reporting period, construction in at least four East Jerusalem settlements was enabled by the granting of building permits for over 900 housing units in Pisgat Ze'ev, Ramat Shlomo, Ramot and Gilo southern slopes. Overall, the past three months have seen a high rate of settlement-related activity, especially when compared to 2016, which saw tenders for only 42 units issued and some 3,000 units advanced over 12 months in Area C.

The reporting period also witnessed large-scale demolitions of structures in Palestinian and Bedouin communities in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, due to the lack of Israeli-issued building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to acquire. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 145 structures were demolished in Area C. It has affected the homes of some 220 people, while another 4,000 people were impacted, directly or indirectly, by the destruction of other property and infrastructure. In occupied East Jerusalem, 48 structures were demolished and two seized, displacing 80 people and affecting 210 people.

There were also a number of concerning legislative developments during the reporting period. On 6 February, the Israeli Parliament approved the so-called Regularization Law, which, if implemented, would effectively authorize the taking of privately owned Palestinian land in occupied territory that has been used for settlement purposes. It contravenes international law and is deemed unconstitutional by many Israeli legal experts, including the Attorney General. Estimates suggest that the law could enable the retroactive regularization of thousands of housing units and the gradual legalization of dozens of settlement outposts. The law marks a significant shift in the long-standing Israeli position concerning the legal status of the occupied Palestinian territory.

Allow me to turn to the problems of violence and terror, inflammatory rhetoric and provocations that remain a hallmark of the conflict. Resolution 2334 (2016) calls on all to refrain from such acts and

undertake efforts to combat them. During the reporting period, the security situation in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory remained relatively calm. There was a rise, albeit from a low level, in certain categories of incidents, namely, rocket attacks against Israel from Gaza. Eleven Palestinians were killed and over 273 injured by the Israeli security forces, including during attacks or purported attacks, clashes and security operations. In addition, one Palestinian was killed by an Israeli civilian while attempting to carry out a stabbing attack, and two Palestinians died of wounds they had sustained in October and November 2016 from Israeli security forces.

Four Israeli soldiers were killed and 70 other Israelis were injured in attacks by Palestinians. On 8 January, a Palestinian man killed four Israeli soldiers and injured another 15 in a ramming attack in Jerusalem. On 9 February, in a terror attack in Petah Tikva, a Palestinian from Nablus shot and stabbed six Israelis. On 6 March, in a two-hour exchange of fire, a Palestinian activist, Basel Al-Araj, was killed during an arrest operation by Israeli security forces in Al-Bireh, which is near Ramallah, in Area A.

After over three months of calm, between 6 February and 19 March Palestinian extremists in Gaza fired 10 rockets towards Israel, five of which impacted without causing injury. In response to these attacks, the Israeli Defence Forces conducted 18 airstrikes at militant locations inside Gaza. In total, two Palestinians in Gaza were killed and 24 injured as a result of various Israeli military actions. On 16 January, in the village of Tuqu', near Bethlehem, a 17 year-old boy was shot dead by the Israeli security forces. The Israeli authorities have opened an investigation into the incident, bringing to at least 17 the number of investigations opened into similar incidents since September 2015. This period saw a total of over 260 Palestinians killed by the Israeli security forces, 170 of whom were carrying out or reportedly carrying out attacks.

One case, against Sergeant Elor Azaria, has led to an indictment and conviction for unlawful killing. On 4 January, Azaria was convicted of manslaughter for shooting dead an incapacitated Palestinian assailant in Hebron in March 2016. On 21 February, he was sentenced to prison for 18 months and demoted. As noted by the Spokesperson for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on 24 February 2017, such a lenient prison sentence "is difficult to reconcile with the intentional killing of an unarmed and prone individual". On 7 March, the military prosecution, calling the current sentence "excessively lenient", filed an appeal seeking a three-to-five year term of imprisonment.

While the resolution calls upon both parties to refrain from acts of provocation, incitement, and inflammatory rhetoric, such actions continued during the reporting period. The reactions of Hamas officials to terror attacks against Israelis have been particularly reprehensible and deserve condemnation. A recent sermon by a Hamas leader and member of the Palestinian Legislative Council in Gaza included appalling and racist language inciting violence against Jews. Statements were issued by Hamas and a number of other Palestinian factions celebrating as "heroic" the terror attacks in Jerusalem and in Petah Tikva. A senior leader, addressing a rally following the truck ramming, sent

> "a message of encouragement and support for every jihadi who carries out an attack that puts an end to the acts of the Zionist enemy".

Regrettably, Palestinian Authority officials have not condemned those attacks, while Fatah's social media pages continue to commemorate perpetrators of previous attacks against Israeli civilians.

Provocative statements also continued on the Israeli side. A number of politicians have called for the annexation of parts or all the West Bank and for a categorical denial of Palestinian statehood. One political leader called the notion of a Palestinian State a "historic disaster" and a "hallucination", while another spoke of only the Jewish people having "national rights" between the Jordan and the sea.

Resolution 2334 (2016) reiterates the call of the Middle East Quartet on both parties to take affirmative steps to reverse the negative trends on the ground that are imperilling the two-State solution. Allow me to outline some of the moves taken by Israel and the Palestinian Authority that may be broadly considered to be in this context.

In February, the Palestinian Authority took a significant step towards strengthening its institutions and improving governance, by finalizing the Palestinian national policy agenda for 2017-2022. The agenda reiterates the Palestinian Authority's commitment to State-building and to guaranteeing the rule of law. Continued support for the Palestinian Authority in

providing governance and security remains critical. In January, the Palestinian Government approved the general budget for 2017 and, owing to the strong fiscal performance in the previous year, was able to reduce the budget deficit. Continued fiscal discipline and a push for revenue growth will be essential during this year as economic and financial conditions are likely to continue to be restrictive.

In a positive development, on 15 January, after six years of inactivity, Israel and the Palestinian Authority agreed to reactivate the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Water Committee. It was established under the Oslo agreements in order to improve the water infrastructure and supply in the West Bank and Gaza. The new agreement outlines the types of water projects that need approval by the Joint Water Committee, and thus by default those not requiring approval. This comes on the heels of agreements on electricity, 3G and postal services that have been signed in the past six months.

It is also important to note that both Israel and the Palestinian Authority remain committed to maintaining security coordination amid increasing political and popular pressure on the Palestinian Authority to cease such coordination. I take this opportunity to note the professionalism of the Palestinian security forces in providing public order. They operate in a highly volatile environment, and I encourage Israel and the international community to continue supporting the advancement of their capacity and capability.

The reporting period also saw progress in Gaza reconstruction and recovery. More than 225,000 tons of cement were imported through the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism — a significant increase over the previous three-month period. Israel also approved nearly 3,300 residential construction and reconstruction projects, compared to only 78 over the previous three months.

During the reporting period there were no developments related to Member States' distinguishing, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied in 1967. There have, however, been efforts by the international community to take up its responsibility to resolve the conflict. In that respect, I would like to note the international conference hosted by France on 15 January, which was attended by representatives of some 70 countries. As a follow-up, interested participants resolved to meet again before the end of 2017 to review progress and to support both sides in advancing a resolution to the conflict.

In January, representatives of most Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, met in Moscow. The Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation addressed the participants, stressing the need to overcome divisions on the basis of the Palestinian Liberation Organization political programme and the Arab Peace Initiative in order to create the conditions for meaningful negotiations.

On 7 March, I addressed a session of the Council of the Arab League in Cairo, where I spoke of the need to recognize that true peace requires the recognition that both Palestinians and Israelis have legitimate national aspirations that can be realized only in two States. The Arab League adopted a resolution that calls, inter alia, for developing an effective international mechanism to follow-up on the Paris conference for ending the Israeli occupation and achieving a two-State solution within a specific time frame.

Last week, the United States Special Representative for International Negotiations visited Israel, the West Bank and Jordan for initial meetings with political, security and civil society leaders and religious and youth groups. In statements following meetings with the Israeli Prime Minister and the Palestinian President, the Special Representative reaffirmed the United States interest in advancing a genuine and lasting peace. I am encouraged by ongoing efforts to reach agreement with the parties on steps on the ground that will create the conditions for Palestinian economic development and advancing peace.

In conclusion, I would like to share some broad observations about the reporting period. The January spike in illegal settlement announcements by Israel is deeply worrying. The large numbers of advancements, planned infrastructure development, legislative actions and moves to undertake large-scale demolitions vis-à-vis Palestinian communities in Area C indicate a clear intent to continue expanding the settlement enterprise in the occupied Palestinian territory. In the light of this, the adoption of the regularization law is a highly worrying development. Many of the advancements that have been made in the past three months will further sever the territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian State and accelerate the fragmentation of the West Bank. The expansion of the settlement of Kfar Adumim, where 320 units were moved forward during

the reporting period, is gradually dividing the northern and southern West Bank. Planned construction in Shiloh effectively extends the zone that cuts across the central West Bank. Announcements in Kokhav Yakov, situated between Ramallah and East Jerusalem, and in Shavei Shomron, located at a crossroads connecting the three major Palestinian cities of Nablus. Jenin and Tulkarem, are also of strategic significance. Such actions are in breach of international law and must stop. Settlement expansion undermines the very essence of a two-State solution. Resolution 2334 (2016) states that the international community will not recognize any changes to the 4 June 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed to by the parties themselves through negotiations.

Meanwhile, there has been little progress in promoting Palestinian development in Area C. I am particularly concerned about herding communities in Area C in the West Bank, who are struggling to maintain a minimum standard of living in the face of pressure to move. The United Nations has repeatedly stated that the relocation of communities without their fair and informed consent would contravene Israel's obligations as an occupying Power under international law. To foster a climate conducive to meaningful negotiations, Israel must do more to improve the daily lives of Palestinians. It is still crucial to ensure that they introduce significant policy changes that will increase Palestinian civil authority, support Palestinian development and preserve the prospect of a two-State solution, in line with the recommendations of the Middle East Quartet. The agreement to reactivate the Joint Water Commission, after six years of inactivity, is a step in the right direction, but much more can be done by both parties. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Palestinian President and Prime Minister for developing a national policy agenda. With foreign aid continuing to decline, it is critical that the Palestinian Authority and its international partners work together in a structured, transparent and accountable way.

The continuing deadly violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory during the past three months also remains a concern. The recent increase in rockets fired from Gaza towards Israel is a worrying development. Such potentially lethal provocations are unnecessary, dangerous and risk devastating escalation. Resolution 2334 (2016) calls on all to "clearly condemn all acts of terrorism". The continued incitements to violence against Jews emanating from Hamas extremists and some Palestinian groups is unacceptable and undermines trust and the prospects for peace. Similarly, it is important to note that despite the continuing closures on Gaza, there has been an increase in the importation of building materials under the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism. However, the continued restrictions on importing various other materials — considered dual-use by Israel but badly needed for humanitarian and development efforts — continue to be a major obstacle. Despite this positive development, much remains to be done.

International engagement on reviving the peace process over the past three months has confirmed the consensus that a two-State solution is the only way to realize the national aspirations of both peoples. It is critical to ensure that the momentum built over the past year continues to expand and ultimately develop into a concrete vision to end the occupation and the wider conflict. Shaping a credible political horizon through reviving engagement between the parties with intensified international and regional support is essential to advancing that goal. These international efforts must be accompanied by significant steps taken on the ground by the parties themselves in order to create an environment conducive to negotations. The United Nations will continue to call on and work with the parties and all interested stakeholders to find a just, sustainable and comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and to reiterate Uruguay's full support to his work.

Paragraph 12 of resolution 2334 (2016) says that the Security Council

> "[r]equests the Secretary-General to report to the Council every three months on the implementation of the provisions of the present resolution".

Regrettably, the first of those three months were up yesterday and we still do not have the report of the Secretary-General, which we hope will be issued as soon as possible. Uruguay, as it has done since 1947, reiterates

its support to the aim of both Israel and Palestine to live peacefully side by side within secure and recognized borders in a spirit of renewed cooperation free of any threat to peace. In order to achieve that, it is vital that both the Israeli and Palestinian authorities fulfil their obligations under international law in good faith, comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions, give clear political signals that they want to move away from this vicious circle of violent confrontation and refrain from taking unilateral decisions while waiting to begin a dialogue. We are waiting for those signals. We therefore call on the parties to think carefully about their next steps and work to prevent the most extremist wings of their respective Governments from prevailing over those are genuinely committed to peace.

Uruguay, along with virtually the entire international community, firmly supports a two-State solution to the conflict, which is still the only possible way to enable Israel and Palestine to live together in peace and security. In that regard, we urge the parties to relaunch direct bilateral negotiations as soon as possible and without preconditions, which is an essential part of the path to attaining the ultimate goal. But if that is to happen, the trends on the ground that were identified in the Quartet's last report must be reversed, or it will be extremely difficult for Palestine to consolidate its State. The Security Council's adoption in December of resolution 2334 (2016) and the conference organized by France in January were clear indications of how urgent the international community considers the issue of reaching a peaceful conclusion to the process. Israel's announcements in the past two months about the construction of thousands more settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as the retroactive legalization of settlements on Palestinian land, runs counter to the provisions of resolution 2334 (2016), which affirms the unacceptability of the acquisition of land by force. Such measures do not promote peace and endanger the prospects for a two-State solution.

We would like to firmly emphasize that we reject all acts of terror and repudiate any glorification of violence or incitement to it. We cannot simply remain silent about such issues, for otherwise we become complicit in them. Launching rockets from Gaza into Israel is unacceptable, and it is the responsibility of Palestine to put a stop to such attacks. Lastly, we reiterate to the key actors in the process that moderation is essential and unilateral actions that may endanger a future peace process and a solution for these two States are unacceptable.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am grateful for the briefing by the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, who has just given us updated information on the situation in the Middle East, in particular with respect to the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Bolivia reaffirms its firm commitment to resolution 2334 (2016), and we urge all members of the Security Council to join forces to ensure that it is implemented without further delay. We believe that all resolutions emanating from the Council should be implemented with the same rigour and commitment that they require, with the sole purpose of guaranteeing international peace and security.

Bolivia would like to express its most profound indignation at the ongoing illegal settlement activities by the State of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, despite the existence of a Council resolution that expressly reaffirms that the settlements have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation of international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution and of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace. Along similar lines, I would like to reiterate what resolution 242 (1967) demands in its article 1, namely, the "[w]ithdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict". It speaks of the recent conflict because the resolution was adopted in 1967, almost 50 years ago.

Today, three months after the Security Council adopted resolution 2334 (2016), we find ourselves in this meeting with less than encouraging news about the implementation of the resolution. The Israeli Government, using its extreme rhetoric in January and February of this year, announced through its authorities the construction of 6,000 new homes in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, since January 2017 there have been almost 105 demolitions of homes of Palestinian citizens in the so-called Areas C and 14 in East Jerusalem. This type of expansionist and colonizing practices by Israel bring with them the continued confiscation of Palestinian families' land and property, leading to forced displacement of civilians and consequently the transfer

of new Israeli settlers. If we compare the figures with those from last year, where there were 1,093 demolitions, we see that resolution 2334 (2016) has had no impact on the ground. The rate of demolitions after the adoption of resolution 2334 (2016) has been the same as the rate before it.

We call on the Israeli Government to show political will and commitment to the two-State solution. We believe that it is the duty of the Security Council to immediately urge that Israel put an end to its illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and suspend all actions against the Palestinian civilian population, including the inhumane blockade of the Gaza Strip, as well as the immediate cessation of all collective and other forms of punishment.

Bolivia reaffirms its support for the self-determination of the Palestinian people and their right to a free, sovereign and independent State within pre-1967 internationally recognized borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations. Bolivia of course wants there to be peace for both peoples — for the Palestinian people and for the Israeli people. At the same time, Bolivia rejects all forms of terrorism. We endorse the Ambassador of Uruguay's hope that the report called for by resolution 2334 (2016) will be circulated, and we would like to ask Mr. Mladenov to include in his next briefing in this Chamber maps that show how the illegal Israeli settlements are extinguishing the possibility of a two-State solution. We think it is vital that we be able to understand visually what is happening on the ground.

Finally, it has been said in the Security Council that the United Nations — and the Security Council in particular — are fixated on this issue. I was thinking about how we could respond to this claim. Some 70 years after the adoption of the General Assembly resolution that speaks of the two States (resolution 181 (II)), 50 years after the start of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, 10 years after the start of the Gaza blockade, and now three months after the adoption of a resolution that still has not been implemented, the only way I could find to respond to this claim is to repeat the words of Nelson Mandela, who said, "we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians".

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.35 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7909

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7909th meeting
Thursday, 30 March 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Fernández Revollo
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Ciss
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/244)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016) (S/2017/244)

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/244, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014), 2258 (2015) and 2332 (2016).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: The Syrian conflict has entered its seventh year, and we have all borne witness to one of the largest man-made humanitarian and protection crises in the world. Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and millions more injured. Almost 5 million people have fled and are now living as refugees. Crimes against humanity and war crimes have been committed by all parties time and again, as the Commission of Inquiry attested to earlier this month. In Syria, there is not a man, woman or child from any walk of life who has not felt the impact of the particular wretchedness of this especially gruesome and protracted conflict. Syrians have watched huge parts of their historic and proud country reduced to rubble. The building blocks of civilian life, including bakeries, water stations, hospitals, schools, and places of worship, have been gradually destroyed.

The parties gathering in Geneva this week — and those around this table today — surely understand the huge responsibility on their shoulders to bring this Syrian nightmare to an end after years of political intransigence. I cannot emphasize enough how high the stakes are. The Syrian people need to see a tangible improvement in their daily lives because, quite frankly, it is they who have borne the brunt of this conflict. It is my hope, and the hope of every humanitarian, to see the current political process succeed, and we are fully behind the Secretary-General, his Special Envoy, Mr. De Mistura, and his team.

While we rightly acknowledge the current efforts being made on the political track, we have to maintain a laser focus on the fact that violence continues to rear its ugly head in various parts of the country, even if images of it have largely disappeared from the world's television screens since the evacuation of eastern Aleppo. Indeed, the last months have been some of the worst yet for civilians inside Syria and, for Syria, that is saying something. The continued use of explosive weapons and ongoing military operations in populated towns and villages in Hama, Damascus, Idlib, Aleppo, Dar'a, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor governorates have killed and injured hundreds of civilians over the past weeks and displaced tens of thousands more. Attacks on civilian infrastructure such as medical facilities and schools — a trademark of the war in Syria — continue to be reported.

I remain deeply anxious for the safety and protection of over 400,000 civilians due to ongoing military operations in Raqqa governorate. We continue to receive reports that fighting and air strikes continue to result in death and injury for scores of civilians and damage to civilian infrastructure, including schools, bakeries, markets and water infrastructure. For example, on 21 March, air strikes reportedly hit the Al-Badiya school in Al-Mansoura town in western rural Raqqa governorate, resulting in scores of deaths and injuries among the internally displaced people who were living at the school. On 22 March, air strikes reportedly hit a bakery and a local market in the Al-Tabqa area of Raqqa, resulting in dozens of civilian deaths and injuries. And on 27 March, an engineer and technicians, including a Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) volunteer, were reportedly killed as a result of an aerial attack while they were at the Tabqa Dam to assess the dam prior to conducting repairs and stabilizing it. Meanwhile, tens of thousands have reportedly been displaced as a result of the offensive since November 2016, and humanitarian partners have been responding to the displaced.

As the fighting moves to more civilian-populated areas closer to Raqqa city, concerns about the fate of civilians will only grow. I urge all parties to do everything in their power to protect and spare civilians

from the effects of the hostilities, as required, not just requested, under international humanitarian law. The United Nations and partners stand ready to scale up assistance through whichever modality is most appropriate and have prepositioned stocks of relief items in several locations to enable a rapid response in Raqqa, access permitting. But that is the key phrase: "access permitting".

Elsewhere, fighting in the northern countryside of Hama governorate over the past week has had significant safety and protection concerns for civilians. The closure of key roads in Hama has restricted commercial and civilian movement. A hospital in Latmana town was reportedly attacked from the air, resulting in the death of a doctor and a patient. Up to 40,000 people have reportedly fled the affected areas of fighting in northern rural Hama to locations in Hama, Idlib, Homs, Tartous and Lattakia where the United Nations and partners are responding. Some of those internally displaced persons are at risk of further displacement as fierce fighting continues and front lines continue to shift.

In the capital, Damascus, the death and injury of dozens of people by two explosions targeting Bab al-Saghir, where many pilgrims were visiting in mid-March, was an appalling reminder of the willingness of extremist terrorist groups to wantonly target civilians. Similar explosions targeted a court house and a restaurant. The past fortnight has also seen non-State armed groups increase their shelling on populated areas of Damascus, including Bab Touma, Rukn Al-Din and Abbasin Square, killing and injuring many civilians over the past two weeks and leading to the temporary closure of schools in some neighbourhoods.

The hundreds of thousands of civilians trapped in besieged areas continue to face severe and horrific threats at every turn. I remain extremely concerned about the deteriorating security and humanitarian situation in the besieged parts of eastern Ghouta in rural Damascus, where some 400,000 people are trapped by Government forces. Over the past month, we have continued to receive reports of civilian casualties and injuries due to heavy aerial bombardment and artillery shelling of the besieged enclave and adjacent areas of Barzeh, Qaboun and West Harasta. Some 27,000 people have been displaced due to the fighting, including some 17,000 people further into eastern Ghouta and 10,000 people to At-Tall in rural Damascus. More people are likely to flee in the coming days if fighting continues.

According to the World Health Organization, all three public hospitals and seventeen public health-care centres in eastern Ghouta are non-functioning and inaccessible to the population, with several of them reportedly destroyed by airstrikes, although some facilities are reportedly still operational elsewhere. The number of children suffering from trauma injuries is alarmingly high; 30 per cent of all patients with war-related injuries are children under 15 years of age. It bears repeating that 30 per cent of all patients with war-related injuries are children under 15 years of age. The deaths of patients due to lack of dialysis equipment and a measles outbreak have also been reported. Since 20 March, Government forces reportedly have prevented commercial trucks from entering eastern Ghouta, resulting in elevated price hikes for basic staples, while informal trade has also been curtailed.

Put starkly, this tightening of the siege has started a time bomb for the people of eastern Ghouta. It is critical that the United Nations and our partners be facilitated access to the enclave before conditions deteriorate further. The last United Nations humanitarian delivery to any of the besieged areas of eastern Ghouta was in October 2016, nearly six months ago, with other areas not accessed since June 2016. Recent approvals to reach the area could not be acted upon due to the security situation and lack of facilitation letters, although the SARC was able to deliver a portion of the health supplies planned for the convoy on 9 March — including 250 dialysis kits, vaccines and baby milk — to its sub-branch in Duma. This partial delivery was welcome, of course, but clearly wholly insufficient given the scale and gravity of circumstances people are facing.

I have also been following the situation in the besieged neighbourhood of Al-Wa'er, in Homs, with great concern, a community of tens of thousands of people that I visited cross-line in 2015. From November last year until this month, sporadic fighting, limited access to commercial supplies and a growing scarcity of basic supplies have resulted in an insufferable situation for trapped civilians. There has been no United Nations inter-agency humanitarian delivery to the besieged neighbourhood since 26 October 2016, and as I reported last month, a convoy planned for 20 February was forced to turn back due to insecurity and, in the process, trucks were diverted, aid was taken — although some was later retrieved — and drivers were abused.

It is our understanding that a local agreement was signed between the Government of Syria and non-State armed groups in Al-Wa'er earlier this month. As part of that agreement, some 3,500 people — including fighters, their families and civilians — were evacuated on 18 and 27 March from the besieged neighbourhood of Al-Wa'er in Homns towards Jarablus in rural Aleppo. It is our understanding that further evacuations are to take place on a weekly basis until the process has been finalized. Also as part of the agreement, Government forces reopened one of the roads connecting Al-Wa'er neighbourhood with the rest of Homs city and food items are now entering the neighbourhood without hindrance, prices have fallen and electricity has also been restored.

The United Nations has also received reports of an agreement between parties to the conflict to evacuate people from the besieged towns of Madaya and Zabadani in rural Damascus and Fo'ah and Kefraya in Idlib, otherwise known as the Four towns. The agreement reportedly includes the entry of humanitarian assistance and a nine-month pause in fighting covering the Four towns and southern parts of Damascus and its countryside. We are monitoring developments closely as the level of humanitarian and protection needs of those in each of the besieged Four towns remains of the highest severity.

Let me be clear. The United Nations was not involved in any of the negotiations for these agreements or the evacuation process for Al-Wa'er, but I must underscore our concern over such agreements. As we have seen elsewhere, evacuations from besieged areas typically follow months or even years of unrelenting military siege and offensive military action; of severe restrictions on freedom of movement for civilians, as well as on commercial and humanitarian goods; and of unremitting, appalling humanitarian conditions.

All sieges are stark, contemptuous violations of the Council's resolutions. All sieges must be lifted immediately — full stop. However, as I have made clear before, this should not be through any type of surrender agreement that results in the decimation of an area and the forced displacement of some parts of the civilian population. Any evacuation of civilians must be safe, must be voluntary, and must be to a place of their choosing. It is imperative that all those who are displaced through such agreements be allowed to return voluntarily, in safety and in dignity, to their homes as soon as the situation allows. Parties must allow humanitarian organizations safe and unimpeded access to bring life-saving help to those displaced and those who wish to remain, and identify and respond to protection threats.

Let me now turn now to access. I had sincerely hoped that 2017 would bring about a step change in our level of humanitarian access, particularly to besieged and hard-to-reach areas, building on the relative progress of last year, particularly the first nine months. The bottom line is, however, that with a quarter of the year gone, our current levels of access are no better than they were at this time last year. Through the March inter-agency convoy plan, we had sought to reach 787,500 people through road convoys. However, original approvals were received for only 44 per cent, or 348,200 people — the lowest approval rate since March 2016, when the monthly plan process began, although this increased to some 74 per cent later this month when additional approvals for some other locations were received following intense engagement by the United Nations team on the ground

As we sit here today, with the month virtually complete, we have reached some 200,000 people against the plan. This includes convoys for some 133,500 people in the hard-to-reach areas of Bludan and Wadi Barada in rural Damascus and Talbiseh in Homs. This is limited incremental progress, thanks to extraordinary efforts of the team on the ground. The only besieged areas reached through our convoy plan were the Four towns and Khan El-Shih in rural Damascus, which was completed today. In addition, vastly expensive and technically challenging airdrops to Deir ez-Zor continue for nearly 93,500 people given no land access at all to these people besieged by so-called Islamic State. Even then, various medical items on the convoy completed today were removed, and when we reached Madaya, one of the four towns, we were unable to distribute all of the delivered assistance owing to sniping from surrounding militias that itself left several people dead.

After painstaking negotiations by our humanitarian coordinator and the team from the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs on the ground, another convoy is planned to deploy today to the hard-to-reach area of Rastan in Homs, reaching more than 110,000 people altogether, meaning a total of some 310,000 against the plan if the convoy successfully deploys. With several deliveries over the past week, the pace of convoys is picking up. and I salute the round-

the-clock efforts of my humanitarian colleagues in the United Nations, SARC, the International Committee of the Red Cross and our other humanitarian partners in Damascus who bravely make that possible. However, it is still the case that for every convoy that reaches its intended destination, several more are unable to deploy during the month as a result of the Government of Syria's recurring administrative issues and delays. At the same time, some non-State armed groups continue to threaten or refuse to cooperate with humanitarian workers. And sustained United Nations access to areas under the control of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, such as parts of the Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor governorates, remains extremely limited.

While the number of convoys this month represents some progress compared to previous months, it is essential that the Government agree to take further steps to simplify the bureaucratic processes around the preparation and deployment of inter-agency convoys. The current bureaucratic architecture is at best excessive and at its worst is deliberately intended to prevent convoys from proceeding. The United Nations continues to engage the Syrian authorities in good faith to find a way to improve the inter-agency convoy process. As part of that, the United Nations team has submitted a two-month inter-agency convoy plan for April and May with the aim of reaching 1 million beneficiaries in 28 besieged and hard-to-reach locations. It is hoped that spreading the plan over a period of two months rather than one will provide enough space for the approvals to be translated into deliveries on the ground. Aside from genuine security problems, there should be no compelling reason for the convoys to be unable to proceed over that two-month period.

We will do our part to make that happen, but we hope that the Syrian authorities will also do theirs and take the necessary steps. That means removing the requirement for multiple facilitation letters to be received for health, agricultural or water, sanitation and hygiene supplies, and signing facilitation letters within two days of receiving a request from the United Nations. It means allowing delivery on the basis of United Nations needs assessments and allowing requested surgical and medical items to be loaded. Those are all simple steps that, taken immediately, will have a definite positive impact on the lives of suffering civilians in so many parts of Syria.

At the same time, for continued progress to happen, we also need the renewed support of Council members and the members of the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG) in doing their part, which is exerting their individual and collective influence on the parties. The breakthroughs last year and even the progress this week, however incremental, are proof that when there is enough political will, when we work together in the name of humanity, it is really possible to reach people in desperate need of lifesaving assistance. But if we are honest with ourselves and add up the score sheet today, the ISSG has not actually secured any access to the besieged or hard-to-reach areas, either for us — the humanitarian personnel — or the United Nations more broadly. When we have reached them, that has always been as a result of the brave, persistent and patient negotiations by the teams on the ground and by utilizing one or two influential channels.

These years of fighting and continued access challenges have meant that millions of Syrians have been forced to live in appalling conditions, often without safety or the basic essentials of life. Some 13.5 million Syrian people will try to go to sleep tonight in dire need of assistance. The scale and severity of humanitarian needs show no sign of dissipating, and that is why the humanitarian work of the United Nations and its partners remains as vital as ever. Despite all the obstacles and dangers, they are nonetheless doing brave, successful, lifesaving work. And those brave and committed humanitarians have ensured the delivery of aid to as many in need as possible. In 2016, some 6.8 million people on average were reached with food assistance, some 18 million medical procedures were carried out or supported, 12 million treatment courses provided, 13 million people reached with water, sanitation and hygiene support, and 3.4 million children and pregnant or lactating women reached with essential nutrition services.

I must emphasize that the United Nations and its partners, who are mostly brave Syrian colleagues, will continue to stand with the people of Syria to deliver aid to millions of civilians, regardless of which side they are on or are perceived to be on, or if they are on no side at all. I welcome the release of the *2017 Humanitarian Response Plan* for Syria, which outlines requirements totalling some $3.4 billion for undertaking a comprehensive humanitarian response in Syria, including saving lives, enhancing protection and building people's resilience. I sincerely thank donors for their continuing support and respectfully ask them to go above and beyond this year so that we can

maintain our critical humanitarian support to civilians across the country.

Until there is any success in securing peace and silencing the guns fully and permanently, we must once again meet Syrians' immediate lifesaving needs as well as those in the recovery time beyond that, for as long as it takes, in what is now the seventh year of this hideous conflict. That is why the meeting to be held in Brussels on 5 April is so important, because it is this year's pledging event for the Syrian people and their surrounding neighbours. It will build on the successful strategic approach taken in London last year, but will be very mindful of the fact that, just like the humanitarians, the international community and donors are at full stretch.

In addition to all the points I have made this morning, I would like to finish by adding my voice to the two urgent appeals to all parties made by the Secretary-General earlier this month. First, we should make the most of the 30 December 2016 ceasefire established by the guarantors of the Astana meetings by enhancing it further with real protections for civilians and civilian infrastructure, and by removing the remaining obstacles and impediments in order to ensure that humanitarian aid keeps flowing to reach all those in need in Syria. Secondly, we should appeal to the parties, and all those with influence over them, to strive to overcome their differences and work together to put an end to the conflict. That is the only way to stop the suffering of Syrian men, women and children. I sincerely hope that this is the year that the parties to the conflict, and those who support their actions, regain their sense of humanity. As the Secretary-General has said, peace in Syria is a moral and political imperative for both the Syrian people and the world, and it is an imperative that cannot wait.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): On behalf of the co-penholders Sweden, Egypt and Japan, I would first like to thank Under-Secretary-General O'Brien for his briefing and his resolute commitment to keeping humanitarian needs in Syria on the global agenda. I would also like to pay tribute to all the humanitarian workers on the ground.

Earlier this month, we passed the six-year mark of the war in Syria. Six years in which the lives and dignity of civilians have been assaulted on a daily basis; six years in which the Council has failed to deliver on its political and moral obligations to the Syrian people. The scale of the humanitarian disaster has reached a level that is difficult to appreciate fully. Syria's development has been bombed backwards by four decades. Seven million Syrians do not know where their next meal will come from. Today the number of refugees in the region has passed the 5 million mark.

Despite the fact that the United Nations-led talks are well into their fifth round, and despite the fact that the Astana ceasefire agreement has been in place for three months, there has been no sustained progress on humanitarian access. It is unacceptable that only one besieged area was reached during the month of February, according to the report we have just heard. This week, however, four inter-agency convoys were allowed to deliver their cargo, substantially increasing the number of recipients for March, at least in hard-to-reach areas. That shows us that it can be done. The Council must not let this week be a one-off. We must try to translate it into systematic and sustained increased access, especially to besieged areas. We look forward to discussing the more technical aspects of how to achieve this with other Council members in the consultations to be held today.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We should like once again to thank Under-Secretary-General Stephen O'Brien for his briefings. We wish also to express gratitude for his work and that of his team, as well as for the courage shown by the thousands of humanitarian workers on the ground, who are risking their lives every day, as has been demonstrated time and again. We pay tribute to all of them.

As the United Nations is an Organization of States, our primary calls are always aimed at States, and we therefore join in the call made recently by Stephen O'Brien on the authorities in Syria to do their utmost urgently to cooperate to ensure access by humanitarian workers to all areas to which the United Nations is prepared to deliver assistance. What is most tragic here is that the United Nations has the material and personnel necessary to provide such humanitarian assistance, but cannot access areas in need owing to what Mr. O'Brien described as being, in the best-case scenario, bureaucratic delays, and, in the worst, deliberate attempts to block such access. We are

therefore united behind the call made on the Syrian authorities by Stephen O'Brien.

The situation has not changed much since last month. As has been stressed, the Syrian war in now in its seventh year. This war has now lasted even longer than the Second World War and shows no sign of coming to an end. There has been some improvement owing to the ceasefire signed last year, which has given the population some respite. Yet the violence continues to escalate, terrorist activities continue in the context of an utterly inhumane level of violence, with the obvious consequent impact on the civilian population, which is the preferred target.

Da'esh and other extremist groups continue to have tremendous potential to cause devastation in the country. As Mr. O'Brien confirmed, an agreement was recently reached to evacuate civilians from various areas, including the so-called four towns, but we share his concern with regard to the conditions under which the evacuations are being carried out. They should be voluntary in nature and to locations chosen by the evacuees themselves, with the freedom to return to their places of origin when conditions permit.

We have also taken note of the fact that several agreements relating to such evacuations are being facilitated. These are agreements between parties, States and groups that had previously been sworn enemies fighting on the ground, but have nonetheless been able to reach agreement so as to enable evacuations to occur. This shows that with political will, it is possible to make progress. We hope that this type of agreement will not be limited to the humanitarian area but also extend to other areas so as to once and for all put an end to the violence and war in Syria.

Mr. Arancibia Fernández (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs General Stephen O'Brien for his briefing and express our full support for the work that has been entrusted to him. We also take this opportunity to acknowledge all of those who are endeavouring to alleviate the suffering of the civilian population of Syria.

Six years after the beginning of this serious conflict, we are dismayed at the situation that the people of Syria are continuing to face. According to reports issued by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, led by Under-Secretary-General O'Brien, today 3.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, caught up in a conflict that has resulted in the internal displacement of 6.3 million people. In the month of March alone, as Mr. O'Brien has noted, 84,000 people have been newly displaced.

We are deeply concerned to see that despite the ceasefire that is in effect in keeping with resolution 2336 (2016), of 31 December 2016, attacks by the parties to the conflict against civilians and infrastructure continue. We firmly believe that the agreements reached must be implemented and respected so that the civilian population can remain on the margins of the conflict.

We deplore the fact that, according to the press statement issued by the World Health Organization on 15 March, more than half of hospitals and primary-care facilities in Syria are either closed or only partially functioning and that their capacity has been even further reduced by indiscriminate attacks on medical infrastructure. We are concerned at the fact that despite the ceasefire and regional agreements, security-related problems in general, particularly in the context of sporadic disputes, have had an impact on the capacity to deliver humanitarian assistance to those in need.

We would also call attention to the worrisome fact that the security forces of the parties involved are continuing to remove certain first-aid items, including surgical and other equipment, from the medical supplies carried by humanitarian assistance convoys, thereby reducing their capacity and effectiveness to assist those persons who urgently require such aid.

We remind the parties to the conflict that they must provide absolute and unconditional access to humanitarian assistance in Syria. We urge them to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and to refrain from hampering the delivery of humanitarian assistance so that it can reach those in need, whether they be in easy-to-reach or hard-to-reach areas. There have also been reports of administrative problems in terms of the approval of monthly plans for humanitarian assistance, and we therefore call on all parties involved to ensure greater coordination and cooperation with the Government of Syria in order to prevent such problems from recurring.

We deplore the fact that in February, more than 400 innocent civilians, including women and children, lost their lives owing to cowardly attacks by Da'esh and to military operations carried out by the forces on the ground. We unequivocally believe that all actions to fight terrorism must be taken in a coordinated manner

with the Government so as to prevent the deaths of innocent civilians, in full respect of the provisions of resolution 2254 (2015) and 2336 (2016).

In this context, we acknowledge and commend the tremendous efforts being made by the Government of Syria to fight Da'esh, a combat that is being waged on behalf of us all. We strongly condemn all terrorist attacks as criminal and unjustifiable, regardless of their motivation and wherever, whenever and by whomsoever committed. We reaffirm the need for all States to combat terrorism by all means, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and other obligations under international law.

Lastly, we reiterate that the Plurinational State of Bolivia firmly and expressly believes that the only way to put an end to this sensitive conflict is through an orderly and inclusive Syrian-led political process. We therefore reiterate our support for the progress made at the Astana and Geneva meetings. We have high hopes that these dialogues will bear fruit.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.40 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7910

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7910th meeting
Friday, 31 March 2017, noon
New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2017/206)

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The meeting was called to order at 12.05 p.m.

Expression of sympathy on the deaths of two United Nations Experts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The President: On behalf of the members of the Security Council, I should like to reiterate our condemnation, in the strongest terms, of the deaths of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan, from the Group of Experts, who were senselessly killed while conducting their work in the Kasaï Central region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The members of the Security Council express their deepest sympathy to the families of the victims and to the Governments of Chile, Sweden and the United States, as well as to the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the United Nations Secretariat.

Michael and Zaida lost their lives seeking to bring peace to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its people.

I now invite Council members to rise to observe a minute of silence in their memory and in the memory of all the victims of violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The members of the Security Council observed a minute of silence.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2017/206)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the United Republic of Tanzania to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Augustine Phillip Mahiga, Minister for Foreign Affairs, East Africa, Regional and International Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/268, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France, Italy, Japan, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/206, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2348 (2017).

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements after the voting.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): France welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2348 (2017), which renews the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The resolution we have just adopted is the outcome of negotiations that were not always easy, but it is a text of significance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to the United Nations.

I would like to highlight three reasons why this positive text is important.

First, the Security Council today has sent a message of unanimity and unity in our support for MONUSCO and for stability and democracy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which as we know is facing significant challenges.

Secondly, with the adoption of the resolution, MONUSCO — which has a defining role to play — now

has an adapted mandate focused on two major strategic priorities: the protection of civilians and support for the implementation of the 31 December agreement and the electoral process. This is a critical point, as the goal of the negotiations that have just concluded was to adapt MONUSCO to the political and security issues that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has to address, in particular this year.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo finds itself an unprecedented institutional situation. The mandate of all its electoral institutions has expired. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has entered a phase of transition on the basis of the political agreement signed on 31 December 2016 until the elections scheduled for the end of this year. The agreement, which was reached thanks to the outstanding efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, constitutes the only credible road map for an end to the crisis, but delays in its implementation are very worrying. It is essential for the stability and future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that the agreement be implemented as soon as possible and that the elections be held.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is also facing a worrying security situation with the persistence of armed groups in the east of the country and the appearance of new outbreaks of violence, particularly in Kasaï, where many Congolese have died over the past year and where two United Nations experts — as you recalled, Mr. President — recently died in tragic circumstances. On behalf of France, I wish here to reiterate our sorrowful condolences and deep sympathy to the families of the two victims and their countries. Civilian populations must be protected from such violence, whose perpetrators must be identified and brought to justice.

The third reason why this resolution is particularly important is because it adapts the composition of MONUSCO in a consistent and thoughtful way so that it can better respond to the challenges facing the country. The troop ceiling has been adjusted to better reflect the reality of deployment on the ground, but it is mainly the composition of the force that has been revised through the replacement of certain troops by specialized units able to intervene quickly and in a mobile way in the specific context of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. From the very outset, this mandate makes MONUSCO more reactive, more mobile and more focused on the essential, guiding priorities that I have just enumerated.

For the future, let us be clear. The task is heavy but MONUSCO has reinvigorated means at its disposal. In that spirit, I should like on behalf of France to reiterate our confidence in the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Maman Sidikou.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): First, I want to express, on behalf of the United States, the sadness and heaviness we all feel at the loss of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan. I know my friends in the Swedish delegation feel the same way, but it is very telling that when we focus so much on these types of things and what we are trying to do, we have to remember the people on the front line who are trying so hard to protect people on the ground. These are real people with real families who make real sacrifices. It is a sobering reminder that we can never forget that when we have people on the ground trying to keep peace, we have to do all we can to make sure that we are keeping them as safe.

I want to thank Ambassador Delattre for his time and effort and for the negotiations and the care with which all of this was done. I certainly want to tell the Security Council how pleased I am that we that we moved forward, because the whole mission was keeping the Congolese people in mind, and when we look at these peacekeeping missions what we need to focus on is not the number of people we have on the ground but the quality of the work that is happening on the ground. What we are seeing is an area where we can have thousands and thousands of troops, but if they are not really working to keep the Congolese safe, none of that matters.

I was therefore very pleased that we cut the troop ceiling, but we made sure that the troops are actually going to be more effective where they are deployed. As François said about the specialized units, the key is to make sure that the elections are safe, that we are keeping people safe and that we are actually looking at the political problems on the ground. The idea that we are really pushing towards long-term stability and good governance is something we should all be very proud of.

Always prioritizing the protection of civilians is the one thing that I think is most important. We are very grateful to the contributing troops that come into the area, but we can never forget that the whole goal is to keep the Congolese safe. In order to do that, we have to hold the troops that are actually doing this accountable,

and what I believe was one of the best things that came out of this exercise was the strategic review that we will get back in September, because what we cannot do is walk away from this and say our job is done. What we need to do is keep looking and making sure that what we did is actually working and effective and meeting the goals we have set.

That is why I thought it was very important and appreciated hearing France affirm the specific indicators that we are going to be watching. We actually have measurables now so we can look back and see where the troop failures are happening, because we owe it to people like Michael and Zaida on the ground to let them know what is expected and what we need to have happen so that they can be protected. I think that now having measurables whereby we can do that and hold those troops accountable to do the best job they can is going to be important.

With that, I also think that moving this focus away from all of the other things related to the mandate and towards the people and making sure it is effective and successful is going to be good for all of us, because at the end of the day we have to honor Michael and Zaida. I think that the way we honour them is by making the Mission stronger and more effective. I believe that the entire Security Council did that today, and I am very proud to be a part of it and to see what we have done and how we have done it. I look forward to continuing to work on this issue so that we can make sure that we eventually get them to a peaceful and stable place.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, we would like to express our deep sorrow and condolences to the Governments of the United States and Sweden and the families of the two experts who recently lost their lives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I was honoured to work closely with Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan in my capacity as Chairman of the Committee established pursuant to resolution resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They were a true inspiration. They were brave and dedicated to their work, despite the risks and difficulties that surrounded their mission.

The heinous event that claimed their lives reminds us of the difficulties and tragedies confronting many victims of violence in the Congo. We must therefore work with greater determination and commitment to ending the violence and establishing permanent peace in the country. This painful event also reminds us of the sacrifices made by United Nations personnel in the field, be they military, police officers or civilians. These sacrifices deserve all our gratitude and respect.

Egypt welcomes the adoption today of resolution 2348 (2017). It stresses the importance of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which plays a vital role in supporting stability and establishing peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. That is the same message of the communiqué issued today by the African Union Peace and Security Council. We welcome the fact that supporting the 31 December 2016 political greement is one of the strategic goals of MONUSCO's mandate, which is also charged with providing support and assistance for the elections process, given the importance of the agreement to maintainng security and stability in the country. Egypt calls for intensifying efforts to overcome the current deadlock concerning the special arrangement talks. We look forward to the resumption of the mediation efforts by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, as well those of the African Union.

The many challenges confronting the Democratic Republic of the Congo at the political and security levels and the increasing activities of armed groups and the spread the violence serve to underscore the need to provide human and financial resources to MONUSCO, including supporting and enhancing the role of the Congolese army so that it can confront those challenges. We agree that we need to take advantage of peacekeeping operations and increase their efficient use of resources, as well as when it comes to other United Nations activities. We welcome the commitment of the Secretary-General in that regard. Moreover, we believe that reconsidering the number and resources of peacekeeping forces should not be based solely on realizing savings. We need to carry out a comprehensive study of the situation and the needs on the ground and to evaluate the nature of the resources required to enable any mission to implement its mandate, so that they do not face shortcomings that could have an adverse effect on their performance.

Egypt is proud of its role as a MONUSCU troop-contributor, as well as in other United Nations missions. We consulted with other MONUSCO contributors with regard to the contents of today's resolution. Troop-contributing countries(TCCs) are one of the main pillars of the United Nattions peacekeeping system. Through their troops, TCCs make great sacrifices in the

service of peace and security. Any efforts to enhance the efficiency of troops and overcome shortcomings in their performance must therefore take place through a triangular partnership among TCCs, the Secretariat and the Security Council.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): At the outset, let me join previous speakers in expressing condolences to the families of the two brave and dedicated members of the Group of Experts — Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan — killed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The parties responsible for their deaths must be held accountable.

Japan welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2348 (2017). I would like to thank France for taking the lead in preparing the resolution. Japanese is pleased to have co-sponsored it. Our common goal is to stabilize the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and achieve a progressive exit of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). Let me underscore two points in that regard.

First, through this resolution the security Council reaffirms its strong support for the implementation of the 31st December 2016 political agreement, mediated by by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo. Japan calls on President Kabila and all Congolese political actors to swiftly implement the agreement and accelerate preparations for elections, to be held by the end of this year. That is the only viable way to consolidate and sustain peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Secondly, Japan values the fact that the Security Council has reaffirmed its commitment to making the Mission more efficient by authorizing a clearer and more prioritized mandate for MONUSCO in line with the Secretary-General's efforts. Japan reaffirms its full support for MONUSCO and for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Maman Sidikou.

Mr. Cardi (Italy) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, on behalf of my Government, I should like to express my condolences to the families and the two members of the Group of Experts killed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also extend our sympathy and solidarity to the United States, Sweden and Chile. We share their pain and sadness.

We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2348 (2017), which sends a very strong strong signal of the Security Council's unity on such an important issue. Allow me to thank the French delegation for its efforts on the text, which is an outcome commensurate with the challenges we face today.

The renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is a tangible sign of the willingness of the United Nations to continue supporting the people and the Government of that country. This year marks a major milestone in the country's history, and this peacekeeping force must ensure the protection of civilians and support the implementation of the Saint-Sylvestre agreement and the electoral process, which are two complimentary elements of the strategy for maintaining peace in the country.

The commitment of troop-contributing countries remains crucial. We hope that it will be possible to find increasingly specialized resources that can provide greater effectiveness and mobility to the Mission. We should of course also appreciate the efforts of troop-contributing countries in extremely difficult conditions. The issue of the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions is very important, and we must increasingly improve their performance. We remain willing to work to that end.

In that regard, Italy agrees with the analysis and proposals made by the Secretary-General in his report (S/2017/206) to the Security Council. We hope that the mandate in today's resolution regarding the possibility of cooperation among various missions can prove to be a sufficiently flexible tool to bolster the effectiveness of MONUSCO.

We stress the importance of swiftly carrying out the specific arrangements set out in the Saint-Sylvestre agreement, which was signed thanks to the mediation of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, which I commend. I should like to conclude with a call for political compromise in order to hold peaceful, credible and inclusive elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China is deeply troubled and disturbed at the death of two United Nations officials. I should like to extend our condolences to the families of Mr. Michael Sharp and Ms. Zaida Catalan and to the countries concerned. The

safety and security of United Nations personnel must be effectively guaranteed. Any attack on United Nations personnel is intolerable.

China voted in favour of resolution 2348 (2017), which the Security Council just adopted. China has always paid close attention to the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We appreciate the efforts made by that country's Government to facilitate the peace process, safeguard national stability and promote economic development. We encourage the parties to actively implement the political agreement and resolve their differences through dialogue and consultation.

China has always supported African countries in addressing African issues in African ways and has supported regional and subregional organizations in Africa in playing an active role in resolving regional problems. We hope that the countries of the Great Lakes region will strengthen their cooperation and jointly implement the Framework for Peace, Security and Cooperation for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Great Lakes Region, and achieve common regional security and development. The international community should act, on the basis of respecting the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, and continue to provide constructive assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

China supports the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in its implementation of its mandate and in the constructive role it plays to assist the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in advancing the political process, combating armed groups and facilitating humanitarian access.

United Nations peacekeeping operations need to adjust their mandates and scope in a timely manner in accordance with changing circumstances and the will of the State concerned. We hope that, in accordance with resolution 2348 (2017), the Secretariat will continue to engage in dialogue with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the implementation of the mandate of MONUSCO, as well as on its financing, while fully taking into account the views of that Government, and stepping up the reform of the peacekeeping system so as to enhance the operational effectiveness of the Mission and bolstering its ability to cope with complex situations.

China has always supported the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and has over the years provided , within our abilities, assistance to its nation-building efforts. China has sent more than 200 peacekeepers to MONUSCO. China stands ready to work with the international community and continue to play a constructive role towards the realization of lasting peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Vitrenko (Ukraine): Ukraine supported and co-sponsored resolution 2348 (2017) because, in our view, it will pave the way for further stabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Today, the Security Council adopted a document that is intended for the first time to privatize tasks of MONUSCO primarily for the protection of civilians and support for the implementation of the agreement of 31 December 2016. We hope that that approach will help the Mission to address existing challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a more efficient and effective manner.

The years 1970, 1977, 1984, 2006 and 2011 marked the previous elections held in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We hope that in 2017 the people of that country will again have a chance to choose their Head of State and determine their future in a free and fair manner. It may take a year for the long-awaited peace and stability to appear on the horizon. We therefore call on all national stakeholders to spare no effort in swiftly implementing the agreement of the 31 December 2016 without any preconditions.

I cannot but join others in expressing our deep condolences to the families of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan of the United Nations group of experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as to the United States and Sweden. The world and the United Nations lost two brave and decent people who, while risking their own lives, tried to bring peace and stability to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. No effort should be spared to hold accountable those responsible for that outrage.

Finally, since this is the last day of the United Kingdom presidency, I would like to sincerely congratulate you, Sir, for a very successful and productive month characterized by a masterful British touch.

Mr. Ilichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We join others in conveying our condolences and sympathies following the deaths of the two

young and courageous experts, Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan.

Russia voted in favour of resolution 2348 (2017), extending the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We believe that, during this difficult time in the country's political history, it is important for the Mission to continue to carry out its work in stabilizing the eastern areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and facilitating the implementation of the political agreement of 31 December 2016. We believe that all of that will be carried out by the Mission in full respect for Congolese sovereignty.

At the same time, we are not pleased with the approach taken in deciding to reduce the size of MONUSCO. In that regard, the Russian delegation initially proposed identifying tasks that could be discontinued without prejudice to the performance of the mandate or that could be delegated to the country team, only thereafter reducing the number of Blue Helmets deployed. We regret that financial and sheerly numerical considerations prevailed.

We are also concerned about the plan to have two parallel cycles of reporting to the Security Council on the activities of a single peacekeeping operation, as set out in the resolution. We believe that the solution that was forced through by the informal leads on that issue could negatively affect the implementation of peacekeepers' mandate and result in problems with regard to the organization of the Security Council's work. We trust that our colleagues will follow their own stated understanding whereby the Secretary-General's submission of updates on the implementation of the internal Congolese agreement will not automatically mean holding Security Council consultations.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2348 (2017), renewing the mandate of United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), including the Force Intervention Brigade. We understand that it has indeed been a difficult negotiation process, and not everyone has secured what they wanted. In the end, we are pleased that the Security Council was able to achieve consensus through compromise. We believe that maintaining that spirit of unity within the Council on this and other matters is absolutely important. France should be commended for ensuring that that is what transpired during negotiations on the draft resolution, of which we are very appreciative.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is at an important political juncture. The agreement reached by the Congolese political actors on 31 December 2016, with the mediation efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo, has without any doubt averted a major political crisis. The immediate implementation of the agreement is indeed the key to preserving the stability of the country and paving the way for a peaceful political process.

It is indeed appropriate that the Security Council has called on all stakeholders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to redouble their efforts towards a speedy conclusion of the ongoing talks on the implementation modalities in line with the 31 December 2016 agreement and proceed without further delay to preparations for the presidential and legislative elections due to take place before the end of 2017. Mobilizing the necessary resources for the electoral processes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure long-term security and stability in the country and the region in general is indeed critical. It is also important that the countries of the region, the African Union and the United Nations act in unison and put their full weight behind those efforts to ensure a smooth transition process and the holding of elections as envisaged in the agreement. In that regard, we would like to refer to the communiqué adopted by the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union two days ago on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which underscored the latter point.

The deteriorating security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is taking a heavy toll on the civilian population. We are particularly concerned about the activities of armed groups in the eastern part of the country and the resurgence of negative forces. Those have enormous implications with regard to peace and security not only for the Democratic Republic of the Congo but also for the Great Lakes region. That needs to be addressed seriously within the PSC framework agreement. The role of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region and his continuous regional and international engagement in the promotion of peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the region, including through the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for

the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, in consultation with countries of the region and the guarantors, remain very important.

In the light of the current political and security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the continued support of MONUSCO in maintaining peace and security in the country and ensuring conditions conducive to a smooth political process cannot be overstated. The adoption of today's resolution is therefore very important, and we hope that the Mission will carry out its mandate, strategic priorities and tasks, as outlined in the resolution, with greater efficiency and effectiveness.

We commend the leadership of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and pay tribute to the military and civilian personnel of MONUSCO, who are doing everything they can to implement the mandate of the Mission in a difficult and challenging environment. It is imperative that the Mission be given the means and capabilities necessary to carry out its tasks, including addressing the threat of the negative forces.

Finally, we are deeply saddened by and shocked and really angry at the brutality that ended the lives of Michael and Zaida, two members of the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but it is not enough to lament what befell them. No stone should be left unturned in the search for the murderers to ensure that they are held accountable. We convey our deepest condolences to their families, their colleagues, as well as to the United States and Sweden, for the loss of their nationals.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I want to thank you, Mr. President, and everyone else, all our colleagues, for expressing and sharing their deepest condolences to the families and friends of Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan. I fully share the sense of loss, of sorrow and despair at this very difficult moment.

Zaida was a Swedish-Chilean national who dedicated her life to peace and justice. She combined professionalism with compassion and she risked her own life to save others. As a member of the United Nations Group of Experts, Zaida worked tirelessly to contribute to the understanding of the causes of conflict and insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We will honour her memory by continuing to support the work of the Group of Experts and the whole United Nations family in that country.

The circumstances surrounding this attack must now be thoroughly investigated. The four Congolese citizens who remain unaccounted for must be found. Sweden fully supports the investigation by the United Nations and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that the facts are established and that those responsible are held to account.

We welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2348 (2017) today. In the current fragile situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the agreement by the Council on a clearly prioritized mandate for this vital United Nations Mission is crucial. We thank France for its able leadership during the negotiations. The resolution contains two clear priorities. First, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has received a robust efficient and updated mandate to protect civilians and, secondly, the resolution provides support to the political process by making it a key priority for the operation. There is now a need to reduce the current unacceptable levels of violence and to fully implement political agreement as a basis for moving towards free, democratic and peaceful elections, which is essential.

The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a long-standing item on the Council's agenda. The future of the country is ultimately in the hands of the leadership and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, we hope that today's action by the Council can help contribute to moving the country one step closer to the stability and prosperity that its people deserve.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The thoughts of the Senegalese delegation are with Zaida Catalan and Michael Sharp. We would like to convey our sincere condolences to their families and the Swedish Government and the American Government. Our thoughts are also with the four Congolese nationals whose whereabouts are still unknown. We must find the murderers of Zaida and Michael and bring them to justice.

Resolution 2348 (2017), which we have just adopted by consensus and which renews the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), marks without a doubt a critical phase in the United Nations presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, we hope, towards lasting peace and stability in a great African country and a friend of Senegal.

My delegation was guided, throughout the process of negotiating and drafting the resolution, by the desire to see strengthened coordination on the ground among the various partners of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure the greatest possible impact for the activities of the United Nations and the African Union, of course, as well as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

Today's resolution reaffirms the Council's support for the implementation of the San Silvestro agreement. It reaffirms, among other things, our support for MONUSCO and improves its agility. We hope that, with better equipment, MONUSCO will be able to contribute more effectively to the protection of civilians and, at the same time, in coordination and cooperation with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo, to combat and neutralize the negative forces.

I take this opportunity to express Senegal's support for all United Nations staff who have worked tirelessly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. First and foremost, I would like to thank Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who is a dear friend of ours. It is in that spirit that Senegal, a troop-contributing country, is awaiting the strategic review of MONUSCO and wishes every success to the mediation efforts of the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo aimed at ensuring a credible and successful peace process.

Mr. Bermúdez (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): First and foremost, allow me to add our voice to the expressions of solidarity and condolences that have been expressed you, Mr. President, and by Council members, to the family members and the countries of origin of United Nations experts, Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalan, who, together with their Congolese interpreter, Betu Tshintela, tragically lost their lives while seeking to carry out their tasks in a dedicated, thoughtful and responsible way. We convey our sincere condolences to their families.

Uruguay commends the Security Council for its unanimous adoption of resolution 2348 (2017), extending the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). The majority of Uruguay's peacekeepers are deployed in this peacekeeping operation. For that reason, the text we that we have just adopted is of particular importance to my country.

The current situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is complex, and the contingents deployed there, as well as the defenceless civilians, are faced with difficult circumstances that have shown no sign of improving. In that connection, Uruguay would like to express its robust support for the recommendations of the Secretary-General contained in his report S/2017/206, wherein he requests that the number of deployed staff not be reduced and that the number of formed police units be increased. We would like to underscore that the reduction in MONUSCO personnel provided for in this resolution clearly does not correspond with the situation on the ground.

Uruguay believes it essential that United Nations resources be used in the most efficient way. However, in this particular case, we are skimping on resources in a peacekeeping operation whose circumstances still show no signs of improving. It is therefore vital, as far as Uruguay is concerned, that the reduction in the number of troops deployed not affect the essential protection-of-civilians tasks that are currently carried out by MONUSCO. It is worth highlighting that the Security Council has already recently made cuts to peacekeeping operations and has concluded some sanctions regimens, but it has done so in places where the situation on the ground has shown progress. Notwithstanding the aforementioned, we congratulate the penholder and all delegations for their constructive approach, as well as for the spirit of compromise that was evident in the negotiations surrounding this resolution.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2348 (2017) and is pleased to sponsor this important text. We are grateful to all involved and will particularly highlight the roles played by France as penholder and by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Maman Sidikou.

This is a crucial resolution that has come at a crucial time for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The political agreement of 31 December 2016 brought hope to the people of the country for the first-ever peaceful transition of power. Sadly, that hope is beginning to fade. We continue to see worrying delays in the implementation of that agreement — in turning words

into action. We continue to see increasing tensions and insecurity throughout the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also continue to see a clear link between the escalation of local conflicts and national politics. It is essential therefore that the Council remain focused on developments in the country during this fragile period and that it be prepared to respond to developments.

Vulnerable civilians, who have already endured far too much, continue to bear the brunt of this instability and uncertainty. The resolution sends a clear message in response. In particular, we welcome the fact that it does the following three things. It gives clear priority to the essential tasks of protecting civilians and supporting the implementation of the political agreement; it reaffirms the importance of human rights, including monitoring and reporting on human rights in the context of the elections; and it retains the robust mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to tackle armed groups in order to protect civilians, including through the Intervention Brigade.

We all know that mandates are only as good as the brave men and women delivering them. So this resolution also puts in place measures to increase the effectiveness and the efficiency of MONUSCO. It places an emphasis on the importance of performance and calls for a full strategic review of the Mission. It also includes a reduction in the number of troops. This is not about doing more with less, but about using MONUSCO's vast resources in a better, more focused way.

Finally, the killing of the two members of the group of experts is a tragic reminder of just how challenging and complex the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo still is. The United Kingdom would like to underline our gratitude to all those who serve in MONUSCO and in the group of experts, and to send our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of Michael and Zaida. We pledge to uphold their legacy by carrying on the essential work they were doing when they were so tragically killed.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): Sir, as your presidency of the Council comes to an end, I wish to express the full esteem and appreciation of my delegation for the skilful manner in which you have steered the Security Council's debates during the month of March. I would also like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to take the floor before the Council at this meeting regarding the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

My delegation is duty-bound to welcome the presence of His Excellency, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation of the United Republic of Tanzania. I highly appreciate his participation in this meeting. I thank him for his personal support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which he has provided on behalf of his country and on behalf of the States of the Southern African Development Community.

Finally, I want to convey to the Council the gratitude of the Congolese people for the efforts undertaken over the past few years by the United Nations, which continues to seek to restore peace and stability in my country.

Before continuing, allow me to share the sorrow of my Government and to convey to the Governments of the United States of America and of Sweden, as well as to the United Nations, in particular the Secretary-General, the Security Council and the group of experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, its feelings of profound sadness following the death of the two United Nations experts in the province of Kasaï Central. My Government, which conveys its profound condolences to their families and to their loved ones, deeply regrets the deaths of these experts, who for many years were committed to the cause of my country and who died while trying to help it to restore peace. My country is committed to pursuing the investigations already launched to shed light on the tragic circumstances of their death and to identify the perpetrators of that heinous act, as well as to exact the necessary punishment against them.

My delegation takes note of resolution 2348 (2017) just adopted. We thank you, Sir, once more for your commitment to the cause of our country. That commitment is reflected in the firm willingness of the United Nations to spare no effort in putting an end to the situation prevailing in the east of my country, which, as is known, has caused millions of deaths and remains at the heart of the many abuses from which the population

in that part of the country continues to suffer. It is in that spirit that my delegation welcomes with satisfaction the renewal of the mandate of MONUSCO, as well as the arrangements made to improve its effectiveness, in particular for the Force Intervention Brigade.

My delegation hopes — as was also highlighted by the Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of my country, Mr. Léonard She Okitundu, before the Council — that the implementation of this mandate will reflect the expectations of the Congolese people and will be conducted effectively so as to allow us to achieve the goals assigned thereto, and to allow for the swift restoration of peace in my country.

However, my delegation is somewhat concerned by the failure to take into account among the strategic priorities of the new MONUSCO mandate, certain important sectors — such as disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration, as well as security and justice sector reform. The implementation of those sectors has been deferred until after the elections. With respect to disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration, our concern is based on the belief that this process should go hand in hand with eradicating armed groups. We think that by intensifying operations to eradicate armed groups, this process could have provided greater encouragement to combatants in the two groups to lay down their weapons and to receive the guidance that would facilitate their reintegration into society.

Along similar lines, in this important phase the success ofsecurity and justice sector reform could have been promoted by the restoration of the rule of law in troubled areas and the vital support of MONUSCO. However, the Government will do its utmost to safeguard the gains achieved together in that sector by ensuring their implementation. Moreover, my Government reassures the Council of its determination to complete the investigations launched by the high court to shed light on the recent events in Kasaï Central.

Before closing this chapter, my delegation would be grateful to the translation services to make the corrections necessary to bring the French version of the text of the resolution in line with the English-language original, in particular as concerns paragraph 10.

My Government takes note of the downsizing of the MONUSCO contingent by 3,600 Blue Helmets, and will continue its strategic dialogue with the United Nations and international and regional partners in order to determine the schedule leading to the orderly and definitive withdrawal of MONUSCO from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Allow me to come back to two points that we think are important and that we think deserve greater attention. I will begin with the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo (CENCO). As we know, CENCO received a mandate from His Excellency, Mr. Joseph Kabila Kabange, President of the Republic, to carry out good offices with the political class and the civil society of our country to reach a consensus with a view to peaceful elections. Its mandate came to an end three days ago, as the CENCO reported the results of its mission to the President.

With regard to objectives of the CENCO mission, as the Council has surely learned, in spite of the efforts of many the parties were unable to agree on two main points of discord and thus did not sign the specific arrangements, which would have culminated in an agreement on 31 December 2016. The two points of discord are related to the methods by which the Prime Minister is appointed, as well as to the origin and appointment by consensus of an individual to chair the national council for the monitoring of the agreement, following the death of Mr. Tshisekedi. In spite of the points of discord, CENCO has made suggestions to which the Head of State has pledged his full commitment.

For the President, the current deadlock should not be viewed as a failure; talks will continue with a view to taking the most appropriate steps at the earliest opportunity to implement the 13 December 2016 agreement. The Head of State has thus acknowledged that the Prime Minister should be a member of the opposition, which is not a signatory of the 18 October 2016 agreement, and in particular of the Rassemblement, and has called on the parties to select by consensus a chairperson of the Council of Elders. Because he is in charge of ensuring that the country's institutions function effectively, the President will address the nation in both houses of Parliament, in accordance with article 77 of the Constitution.

The second point of discord is related to the combatants of the Sudan People's Liberation Army in opposition in our country. My delegation cannot understand the reasons for the Council's procrastination on that issue. The Council was given detailed information about the situation involving those

combatants, for which MONUSCO alone is responsible because it brought them into our country. That is why my Government, drawing on past experience, continues to ask the Security Council to take the steps necessary to remove those combatants from our country, return them to their home or find a suitable third country to host them.

The Council is well aware that, at that time, the international community had asked my country's Government to open a humanitarian corridor to allow Rwandans fleeing their country during the genocide into our territory. Today, resolving the controversial matter involving the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR) — a situation that the international community created and for which it should assume responsibility — is a burden borne by the Democratic Republic of the Congo. As the Council knows, that situation is not only responsible for instability in the east of my country, but it has also claimed the lives of more than 6 million of our fellow citizens. In the quest for a solution to the issue of the South Sudanese combatants, resolution 2348 (2017) should have put the United Nations at the forefront of that endeavour, rather than the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Before I conclude my statement, I would like to point out that the countries of the region that bear witness to the recurring conflict in the east of my country do not understand why, after so many years in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO has been unable to put an end to the conflict situation. Those countries not only work together; they have also brought that concern to the attention of the United Nations. This time, they would like MONUSCO's mandate to yield results and restore peace to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and, as recommended by the framework agreement, allow them to live harmoniously in peace and to begin development projects that foster regional integration.

I would like to end on that note and, on behalf of my Government, warmly thank all MONUSCO troop-contributing countries — in particular the Intervention Brigade — for the many sacrifices they make daily to allow peace to be restored in my country. Once again, on behalf of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I would like to profusely thank all of the members of the Security Council.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Mahiga (United Republic of Tanzania): At the outset, I would like to join the members of the Security Council in extending profound condolences following the loss of life of the two experts of the United Nations, who paid the ultimate price in their professions, while working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We sincerely hope that there will be an adequate investigation and that justice will be done for the victims of such senseless killing.

As the current Chairperson of the Ministerial Committee for the Southern African Development Community Organ on Politics, Defence and Security Cooperation, I have the honour to deliver these remarks on behalf of the 15 members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which includes the Democratic Republic of Congo, under consideration in today's meeting of the Council. As troop contributors of the Intervention Brigade of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), SADC members have a keen interest in the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate. We thank the Council for its unanimous adoption of resolution 2348 (2017).

I thank the Ambassador of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland for giving me this opportunity, during the final hours of the presidency of the United Kingdom, to make some remarks on the resolution for the renewal of the MONUSCO mandate. I also thank and congratulate all 15 members of the Council led by France — the penholder — for negotiating in good faith and in a constructive manner a difficult text, which has finally been agreed upon and has been adopted. I pay particular tribute to the three African non-permanent members of the Council, namely Egypt, Ethiopia and Senegal, as well as the sponsors of the resolution, for their spirited engagement in the negotiating process.

SADC wishes to reaffirm its solidarity and partnership with the United Nations, the Security Council and Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres, in particular, in seeking a lasting solution to the protracted security and political challenges in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which has lasted for over a decade. The creation of the Force Intervention Brigade by the Council in partnership with SADC four years ago was a unique innovation to the United Nations doctrine of peacekeeping and peace support in dealing with an extraordinary and complex security and political situation that has evolved and existed in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo for many years. Over the past four years, the Intervention Brigade has demonstrated its usefulness in undertaking difficult security operations in the process and has contributed to enhancing the overall credibility of MONUSCO.

As an integral part embedded in MONUSCO, the Intervention Brigade can be good and effective only if the rest of the MONUSCO mission is equally good and effective. For that reason, despite its temporary configuration, the Intervention Brigade deserves to be recognized and appreciated. SADC trusts that the current renewed mandate by the Council has adequately taken into account the symbiotic relationship of the two dimensions of MONUSCO. As the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/206) has underscored, there are new security threats in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that have emerged beyond the Kivus. New asymmetrical strategies and tactics by the multitude of negative forces have also emerged. The tactics, including terrorism, low-intensity, guerrilla-type insurgency, fetish violence and the ideology of genocide continue to rear their ugly heads in the region. Such developments are changing the nature of combat operations and require additional assets to make MONUSCO more effective in dealing with those negative forces.

Similarly, issues such as politically motivated agendas, gross human rights violations and the protection of civilians from community-based violence are posing additional challenges to the rest of the integrated MONUSCO mission, made up of soldiers, police and civilians. We believe that has been factored into MONUSCO's renewed mandate. We fully agree with the views articulated by Council members this afternoon about the fact that we need to make MONUSCO more efficient and effective, not so much in its numbers but in its performance.

Despite these new security and protection challenges, the Security Council, SADC, the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the countries of the International Organization of la Francophonie should take advantage of the current political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to find a lasting solution to its problems. This time the Government and other political actors in Kinshasa should not be allowed to use security concerns to once again delay or renege on the political commitment arrived at on 31 December. In that regard, we believe that MONUSCO will have a special responsibility for securing a political space that will enable the holding of free, fair and peaceful elections.

The logistics of organizing elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are indeed daunting. SADC is urging the international community to support the Independent National Electoral Commission in registering voters and organizing countrywide elections. It is equally urgent to ensure that all of us engaged in this partnership put pressure on all the political actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a view to overcoming the current political impasse in implementing the 31 December agreement brokered by the Conférence épiscopale nationale du Congo.

To that end, in the next two weeks SADC will field another ministerial mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to confer and consult with the political stakeholders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are not willing to see the agreement falter again, as we have before. As the efforts to rekindle the political process continue, collective action should be taken together with the experts available in the United Nations system to address issues related to disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement, which my colleague from the Democratic Republic of the Congo referred to and which must be dealt with if we are to see sustainable peace and stability there.

Lastly, I believe that the current opportunities in the security and political sectors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the innovations that have been introduced into the MONUSCO mandate, may finally pave the way for an exit strategy for the United Nations peacekeeping and peace-support missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, something that has evaded us for more than two decades.

The President: I thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Republic of Tanzania for his statement.

There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7911

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7911th meeting
Friday, 31 March 2017, 1.20 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rycroft	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Biagini
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Zalyalov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Fesko
	United States of America	Mr. Gee
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

Peace and security in Africa

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17-08553 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 1.20 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Peace and security in Africa

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Cameroon to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2017/270, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

The Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution before it. I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Bolivia (Plurinational State of), China, Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation, Senegal, Sweden, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America and Uruguay

The President: The draft resolution received 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 2349 (2017).

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements following the voting.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Senegal welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2349 (2017) — the first of its kind on the Lake Chad basin. We thank the delegation of the United Kingdom for making it a priority of its presidency of the Council, which is coming to an end today.

There is no doubt that the resolution attests to the Council's strong and firm resolve to support the efforts of the countries of the Lake Chad basin to combat the Boko Haram terrorist movement and, in so doing, to resolve the humanitarian crisis and address the underlying causes of the situation in the region, which is particularly dire. The adoption of the resolution comes on the heels of the Council's visit to Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria from 2 to 7 March and of the open briefing held two days after the end of the mission, which was launched at the initiative of the United Kingdom delegation and which Senegal had the honour of leading alongside France. The resolution places, in a timely manner, the crisis facing these countries at the top of the international community's agenda.

Since the Boko Haram terrorist movement uprising, in 2009, the region has been facing a dual crisis, both security and humanitarian. I need not mention all the figures, as the Oslo conference dwelt at length on the statistics in relation to the humanitarian crisis ravaging the countries of Lake Chad basin countries.

Our resolution, which represents a response to this situation, calls for continued action against Boko Haram through, inter alia, the Multinational Joint Task Force, which was created by and is composed of personnel of countries of the region and deployed by the African Union, so as to help create conditions conducive to stabilizing the region and to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In that respect, it calls on multilateral and bilateral partners to strengthen their support for the Force so as to boost its operational capacity, especially in the areas of logistics, mobility, communication, equipment and intelligence. States are also called upon to contribute generously to the African Union Trust Fund.

The resolution also welcomes the $458 million in humanitarian assistance pledged at the Oslo conference for 2017 and urges swift disbursement of these funds, especially since the countries of the region have already dipped into their own pockets.

Even more important is the interest that the resolution shows in the development dimension, recognizing the indivisibility between peace, security, development and human rights and their importance to the concept of sustainable peace. The resolution also points to the pressing need for the countries in the region to resolve political, economic and gender inequalities, as well as environmental challenges, and encourages the Governments concerned to step up the coordination of their efforts in implementing their respective programmes. It also invites international partners to lend assistance.

Likewise, it calls on the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of

Central African States, along with the Lake Chad Basin Commission, to devise a holistic and effective joint strategy to address the root causes that contributed to the advent of Boko Haram.

In conclusion, I should like to express the wish that the report that the resolution requests the Secretary-General to produce within five months will provide an in-depth understanding of the progress made with respect to the measures that have been adopted.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): My country voted in favour of draft resolution 2349 (2017) following extensive negotiations between the African members of the Council and the countries of the Lake Chad basin. Following these negotiations, substantive amendments were made to the draft, which resulted in a text that is in line with the purposes and goals of the Council's visit to the region earlier this month.

The resolution stresses the sovereignty of these States while remaining within the bounds of the mandate of the Council under the Charter of the United Nations. The resolution also expresses the Council's solidarity with the countries of the region in their efforts to combat the terrorist Boko Haram movement despite their limited capacity, the complex military environment and the gravity of the humanitarian crisis in the region.

Negotiations on the draft resolution on the Lake Chad basin have shown the imperative to improve the working methods of the Council, especially in the area of consulting on its draft resolutions. We stress once again the need to uphold the principles of transparency and of the full and effective participation of all members of the Council, whether permanent or non-permanent, in such negotiations, notably the African members of the Council, in discussions on issues related to the African continent.

The Council must maintain channels of serious, effective and transparent communication with all of the countries concerned by any draft resolution under negotiation, in order to take into consideration their opinions, concerns and proposals, in order to strengthen the credibility of the Council, to prevent any unacceptable interference in the internal affairs of Members of the United Nations and to address the realities on the ground.

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): Japan welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2349 (2017) and thanks the United Kingdom for its leadership. Japan is pleased to have co-sponsored the resolution.

The resolution represents a milestone in the Security Council's increased attention to the Lake Chad basin. It also represents a test for us in terms of taking a truly integrated approach to the region's multidimensional challenges. The issues facing the Lake Chad Basin, which range from terrorism and trafficking to food insecurity and climate change, cannot be solved individually.

The resolution reflects the fact that security gains must be paired with support for development, livelihoods, human rights and other efforts to address the root causes of instability. We must build on this foundation resolution on the Lake Chad basin by using a variety of tools to achieve these aims, including through the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, the Peacebuilding Commission, subregional and regional organizations, and bilateral and multilateral support mechanisms.

Japan stresses the importance of implementing this resolution, which clearly requires a comprehensive approach. Japan looks forward to working with Council members and many other actors to help sustain peace in the Lake Chad basin.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): Once again, we welcome the unanimous adoption of resolution 2349 (2017) as a follow-up to the Security Council mission to the countries of the Lake Chad basin from 2 to 7 March 2017. There is no doubt that negotiations on the draft required some work. We worked as a trio, together with the countries of the region and the penholder, to reflect the objective of the visit and the sentiments expressed by the Council during the series of meetings with a number of stakeholders, including the leadership at the highest level of some of those countries.

Before proceeding further, I should like to pay tribute to the co-leaders of the mission, the United Kingdom and Senegal, for the success of the mission, which was aided by the meticulous preparation that was done in advance. They deserve commendation.

We believe that the resolution in its current form conveys the right message; that is why we decided to co-sponsor it. We are also happy that the countries in the region are here with us, and it is good that the Council had the opportunity to listen to their views.

I am sure that Council members will agree that we were unanimous in our appreciation of the interrelated nature of the security and climate-change-induced environmental challenges that the countries of the Lake Chad basin region are facing and the major impact that the fall in the price of commodities has had on their economies.

It was also very clear to us that there was no sufficient realization within the international community of the magnitude of the serious challenge faced by the region. We therefore expressed our firm solidarity and support for countries in the region in overcoming their challenges and underscored the need for a comprehensive and holistic solution through intervention oriented towards long-term development. It is therefore only appropriate that the resolution remain true to that sentiment, and that is what we tried to do during the negotiations. That is also precisely what countries of the region that enthusiastically welcomed us during the visit — for which we must be grateful — expected from the Council. We hope that the resolution will live up to that expectation.

I must conclude by applauding the cooperation and coordination among the four countries of the region in combating Boko Haram, as exemplified in the activities of the Multinational Joint Task Force.

Mr. Zalyalov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): The Russian delegation voted in favour of resolution 2349 (2017), on the situation in the Lake Chad basin, owing to the importance of maintaining consensus in the Security Council and given that the language of the document was acceptable to the representatives of the region. However, we believe that it is necessary to stress that not all of our comments and arguments were incorporated into the text of the resolution.

First of all, we believe that is inaccurate to consider the situation in the Lake Chad basin a conflict. Boko Haram was included in the Security Council's list of terrorist organizations. In March 2015, the group proclaimed its allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. That means that combating the group is, above all, a counter-terrorism operation. We regret that the authors of the draft resolution did not refer to that well-founded description of the situation.

Moreover, one of the important causes behind the deterioration of the situation and the rampant terrorism in the States of the region was not mentioned, namely, the irresponsible policy of interfering in the internal affairs of neighbouring States, in particular Libya.

Like others, we have repeatedly asked our United Kingdom colleagues not to rush the adoption of the resolution simply because the mandate of their presidency was ending, but they did not listen to us. The final document is therefore partially unfinished and unbalanced. We hope that our comments will be taken into consideration with regard to future work.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Plurinational State of Bolivia thanks the delegation of the United Kingdom for having taken the initiative of introducing resolution 2349 (2017), which was adopted unanimously, thereby showing the Security Council's commitment to combating terrorism. In that regard, we would like to highlight the goal of the resolution, which is to show support for the Governments of Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria in their struggle against Boko Haram. We appreciate the efforts that have been made by those countries in developing action plans to combat terrorism, which is a fight that they are waging on behalf of all of us. Accordingly, we call on the Council to maintain a unified front with regard to that issue, while respecting the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of those countries.

However, we support and share the concerns expressed by other delegations with regard to the working methods concerned. We believe that, in this instance, the time allotted to negotiations was insufficient, which meant that some of the delegations' observations were not reflected as optimally as they could have been in the resolution. We believe that, had it been possible, we could have planned for additional negotiations starting where we left off, or postponed putting the draft resolution to the vote.

Mr. Shen Bo (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China welcomes the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) by countries in the region — such as Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Benin, as well as the positive progress that they have achieved in combating terrorism. We appreciate the unwavering determination and tireless efforts of countries in the region in combating terrorism. We support countries in the region to strengthen coordination and cooperation with the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the Economic Community of Central African States and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. While respecting the principles of the

sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of countries in the region, the international community should vigorously help those countries to step up their counter-terrorism capabilities and support the MNJTF in carrying out operations effectively so as to improve the humanitarian situation therein.

The Security Council should concentrate on sending a positive message pledging the international community's support for the efforts of the countries in the region in combating terrorism and mitigating the humanitarian situation. China has always believed that, if members of the Security Council have concerns about a draft resolution, full attention should be given to all such concerns and they should be reflected in the relevant text so as to make the maximum effort to achieve consensus on a draft resolution.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom welcomes the unanimous adoption of resolution 2349 (2017). I am grateful that that consensus was achieved, and I would like to thank Senegal in particular and all members of the Security Council for their work on those issues and support for this important text. The adoption marks the beginning of the next chapter of our work on the Lake Chad basin.

Seeing a crisis first-hand is a good start, but it is not enough on its own. It is not enough just to bring attention to its situation. We will fail the people of the region if we do not respond to what we saw and do not take tangible action to bring real relief and respite to the suffering, the hunger and the instability. Through today's resolution, we have made clear what action needs to be taken.

First and foremost, we need the countries in the region, the international community and the United Nations urgently to scale up their response to the humanitarian crisis. If we act now, famine can be avoided. But that means quickly dispersing money pledged at Oslo — every single dollar of the $458 million pledged by donors, and of the $1 billion pledged by the Government of Nigeria. It means supporting the regional Governments to lead a comprehensive and effective response to the crisis while building on the leadership that they have already shown. It means that all in the region — including the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States — address the root causes of the crisis and economic inequalities, counter violent extremism and empower women. Boko Haram exploits the poverty of the north-east. It exploits the men who view women as no more than objects, wives and cooks without the prospect of a future. That is unacceptable.

We also must avoid a protracted crisis by better bridging the divide between humanitarian and development programming. The United Kingdom is leading by example. We were one of the earliest contributors to the response. We are supporting the regional Governments. And we are expanding our development programming, even as humanitarian aid continues to be delivered.

If we are to bring a conclusion to the crisis, we must also commend and support the countries in the region with regard to their efforts to combating Boko Haram, including through the Multinational Joint Task Force. They must sustain their momentum to defeat Boko Haram and Da'esh. But, as they do so, all parties and countries must comply with human rights, especially during counter-terrorism operations. You cannot defeat terror or build peace if you commit or condone the abuse of civilians. We all must hold ourselves to a higher standard than that. We therefore hope to see the deployment of United Nations human rights officers to help in that regard.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of Cameroon.

Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): As everyone can see, we, the four member States of the Lake Chad basin, are here. My colleagues have asked me to speak on their behalf on this memorable day on which the Security Council, several years after issuing a presidential statement, has now adopted a firm Council resolution — resolution 2349 (2017). I therefore have the honour to speak on behalf of the countries of the Lake Chad region, that is, Chad, the Niger, Nigeria and, my own country, Cameroon.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Security Council for its visit from 2 to 7 March to the countries of the Lake Chad basin, an unprecedented visit by the Council to that part of the world. It allowed Council members to understand the real nature of Boko Haram, which is a nebulous terrorist group, and its actions; the material and human damage it has done; its extremely

barbaric methods using young people, women and girls, including the very young, as suicide bombers or common bandits to burn down schools and villages, attack markets, steal livestock and ambush soldiers and civilian populations. The visit was also an opportunity for members to hear at first-hand from the most senior officials of the countries concerned and to see for themselves on the ground the efforts made by our countries and their peoples at the military, security, humanitarian, diplomatic and development levels to counter the Boko Haram.

The resolution adopted today, following the Council's visit, is an important step forward in mobilizing the international community in support of the countries of the subregion in their onerous task of combating that terrorist sect. As representatives have already said, we are fighting against terrorism. We must recall that the shadowy Boko Haram terrorists were linked with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh by the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015), concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities.

Given the humanitarian, economic, political, social and military costs of this crisis, the countries of the subregion quickly realized that the military response, while essential for the security of people and property, should be part of a holistic approach. It is in that context that each State concerned has adopted and implemented initiatives aimed not only at tackling the root causes, but also at the disastrous consequences of the current situation. In that connection, the Council saw itself during its visit that each of the States concerned has adopted and implemented initiatives aimed not only at tackling the root causes, but also the disastrous consequences of the current situation. I am pleased that the resolution refers to the many development plans designed by the countries of the region.

In the same vein, Cameroon, the Niger, Nigeria and Chad have stepped up their cooperation in several areas to curb and put an end to this situation. This cooperation can also be seen in the framework of regional organizations, such as the Economic Community of Central African States, the Economic Community of West African States and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. One of the key outcomes of this regional cooperation was the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force, which enabled us to significantly reduce Boko Haram's military capabilities. We appreciate the multifaceted support provided by our bilateral and multilateral partners, but as the Council knows, Boko Haram never sleeps. Although roundly defeated on the military front, its capacity to do harm can still be seen in its suicide bombings, abductions and ambushes. We hope that the adoption of this resolution will mark the beginning of more decisive support not only for the Multinational Joint Task Force and regional initiatives, but also for each of the Lake Chad Region countries, which, in order to deal with the multifaceted crises arising from Boko Haram's terrorist actions, are now forced to reduce their budgetary allocations to other national sectors, such as education and health.

Eradicating Boko Haram is a pressing need, both for the countries of the region and for the international community as a whole. We fully appreciate the substance of paragraphs 33 and 34 of resolution 2349 (2017), which invite the Secretary-General to conduct a joint high-level visit to the region with the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the President of the World Bank, the President of the African Development Bank and the High Representative of the European Union in order to strengthen the international community's commitment to implementing the various development programmes being carried out in the region with a view to eradicating poverty and destitution, which are the real deep-seated causes and breeding grounds for Boko Haram. Once the Council has begun to prepare for that visit, we stand ready to welcome Council members with the hospitality that the countries in the Lake Chad basin are known for.

Cameroon, the Niger, Nigeria and Chad hope that the report to be submitted by the Secretary-General will be bold and will make it possible to focus on finding the most appropriate solutions not only in terms of security and humanitarian needs, the urgency of which is beyond question, but also in terms of the deficiencies in education and training, in resilience to climate change and in sustainable development, while at the same time keeping in mind the objective of eradicating poverty. Then and only then can we be sure that we can, all together, ensure a decisive victory over the shadowy Boko Haram terrorists.

We count on the Security Council, just as the Security Council can fully count on us.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nigeria.

Mr. Bosah (Nigeria): I thank you, Mr. President, for your efficient leadership of the Security Council during this month. I also take this opportunity to thank members of the Security Council for their visit to the Lake Chad basin region, which allowed them to assess the security and humanitarian challenges faced by the Governments in the region.

Nigeria fully aligns itself with the statement made by the representative of Cameroon on behalf of countries of the region, and appreciates this opportunity to share one or two remarks as a country at the centre of this insurgency.

We welcome today's unanymous adoption of resolution 2349 (2017), which not only recognizes the complex challenges faced by the region but also encourages regional Governments to sustain their momentum in the fight against Boko Haram and to further enhance regional military cooperation and coordination — a welcome development. Nigeria's consistent support for the work of the Security Council is an indication of our appreciation of this foremost United Nations organ, which has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. The robust discussions that members of the Council held with senior officials of the Nigerian Government during their recent visit bears testimony to that assertion.

At this critical juncture, after an improvement in the security situation due to recent military gains, it was our expectatio that the Security Council and the international community would continue to engage the Governments in the region in the search for lasting peace, security, protection of civilians and the resolution of the humanitarian crisis that arises from Boko Haram activities. We look to the Security Council to continue to approach the situation constructively, as it has done since the emergence of Boko Haram in the regional crisis.

Despite the enormous challenges resulting from the terrorist activities of Boko Haram, the Government of Nigeria remains resolutely committed to combating terrorism and all of its ramifications. We have put in place a robust people-driven counter-terrorism strategy, built on the combination of revamped security operations and a human rights approach, to help lead to rehabilitation, reintegration and reconstruction. In order to achieve that strategic objective, the presidential committee on the north-east intervention has been empowered with a mandate to provide and coordinate synergy, leadership and direction to the various initiatives in the zone. It encompasses Government development partners, private foundations and civil society.

We are also accelerating the implementation of existing legal and institutional frameworks to alleviate the suffering of our people and to provide effective humanitarian aid, in the spirit of the May 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, held in Istanbul. In effect, Nigeria is providing food, support, integrated heath care, shelter, psychosocial support and access to water and sanitation amenities for those in need. We are also engaging highly respected community and religious leaders to discourage vulnerable youths from being radicalized. We will continue to accord the highest priority to bolstering the resilience of internally displaced persons and to increasing their participation in vocational training and skill-acquisition programmes.

The countries of the Lake Chad basin region now desperately need the support of the United Nations and the international community, if it is to achieve credible implementation of resolution 2349 (2017). It is also time for the Council to focus, once again, on the imperative of providing those countries with comprehensive assistance programmes in a variety of areas related to peacebuilding, including ensuring security, building capacity and generating socioeconomic development. The shrinking of Lake Chad has adversely affected the communities around the basin, thereby exacerbating their hardship.

With the scale of the knock-on cross-border effects of the humanitarian crisis, it is increasingly difficult for any single State in the Lake Chad region to independently meet the needs of the vicitims. In spite of our national capacities, we are stretched, especially with the duelling financial resources. All Lake Chad basin countries are making spirited efforts to alleviate human suffering. Nigeria reiterates its call for strong international action in support of the implementation of the the Lake Chad development and climate resilience action plan.

It is apparent that we neither lack ideas nor initiative, but resources — owing to competing demands from all development sectors. We therefore reiterate the urgent imperative for increased global action and active engagement with countries of the Lake Chad basin in order to accelerate recovery efforts. Nigeria reaffirms its commitment to working with

the Council and with the international community as a whole. We deeply appreciate the critical assistance of the United Nations system and partners that support us in the north-east intervention and the Lake Chad basin. We urge the Council to continue to work with us to find more structural solutions, with national ownership spearheading the drive for urgent lifesaving and protecion measures.

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate that the future of the people of the Lake Chad basin region rests on durable security and sustainability of the resources around the lake. We are confident that building genuine collaboration and forging strong partnerships with the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the African Union will enable us to swiftly tackle that challenge.

The President: Before adjourning this meeting, as this is the last scheduled meeting of the Council for the month of March, I would like to express the sincere appreciation of the delegation of the United Kingdom to the members of the Security Council, especially to my colleagues the Permanent Representatives, their team members and to the secretariat of the Council for all their support. It has been a busy month, with numerous highlights that we will summarize for the whole of the United Nations membership and for civil society at the informal wrap-up session this afternoon, at 3 o'clock. We could not have done any of that alone, or without the hard work, support and constructive contributions of all members of the Security Council and of the secretariat, as well as all of the relevant conference services and the interpreters.

In addition to all of those I have thanked, I would also like to express my personal thanks to my excellent team for all that they have done to make this presidency a success. As we end our presidency, I know that I speak on behalf of the Council as a whole in wishing the delegation of the United States all the very best in the month of April.

The meeting rose at 1.55 p.m.

United Nations S/PV.7912

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7912th meeting
Tuesday, 4 April 2017, 10 a.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Solíz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Italy	Mr. Lambertini
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Sadykov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2017/250)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the outgoing President

The President: I should first like to publicly thank the representative of the United Kingdom, who did a fantastic job as President and left us with big shoes to fill; we appreciate his sacrifice and leadership during the past month and congratulate him on a very successful month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Reports of the Secretary-General on the Sudan and South Sudan

Report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (S/2017/250)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Sudan to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2017/250, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mamabolo.

Mr. Mamabolo: I am grateful for the opportunity to brief the Council on the situation in Darfur for the first time since having been appointed head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID).

The three strategic priorities established by the Security Council in its resolution 2148 (2014) continue to provide a framework within which UNAMID implements its protection-of-civilians mandate, mitigates intercommunal conflicts and mediates between the Government of the Sudan and the non-signatory armed movements.

We continue to work with the Government at all levels in pursuance of this mandate with the full understanding that the primary responsibility for the protection of Sudanese civilians rests with the Government of the Sudan.

The Darfur of today is a very different place from what the region was in 2003, when the armed conflict began, and from that of a year ago. Fighting between the forces of the Government of the Sudan and the main three non-signatory armed movements has considerably diminished.

The Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid al-Nour (SLA/Abdul Wahid) is no longer capable of mounting and sustaining significant military operations and has experienced a series of defections that have left it weakened by defections to the Government side. As a result of the military campaign of the past three years, the Government has been able to take control of every area previously held by the movement in and around its heartland of Jebel Marra, leaving SLA/Abdul Wahid with a few pockets of resistance.

The unilateral ceasefire that was extended by a further six months in January is largely holding. SLA Minni Minawi and the Gibril Ibrahim faction of the Justice and Equality Movement have also declared a ceasefire, with SLA Abdul Wahid consistently refusing to do so.

Against the backdrop of economic hardship and social depression, however, banditry and criminality continue to be widespread. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons feeds those negative phenomena, as does intercommunal violence, which is usually triggered by competition, mostly over land, water, grazing and mineral resources. The efforts of the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel, with the support of UNAMID, to get the parties to the conflict in Darfur to sign a cessation of hostilities agreement and to start direct negotiations towards an inclusive peace agreement to end the conflict have remained inconclusive. The current status is hurting all parties and, most importantly, is not sustainable and can only lead to more bloodshed.

On 8 March, President Al-Bashir issued a decree pardoning 259 rebels captured in the fighting with Government forces, including 66 combatants from

Darfur armed movements who were on death row. That is a welcome development that we hope will contribute to affirming mutual trust between the Sudanese parties. SLA Abdul Wahid continues to refuse to join the peace process and seems to want to continue to fight. We would like to appeal to the Council and those with influence and leverage over him to persuade him to recognize the importance of a political settlement and to desist from bringing more suffering upon the very people that he professes to represent.

With regard to the implementation of the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, the 12th meeting of the Implementation Follow-up Commission was held on 6 March under the chairmanship of the State of Qatar. Efforts will continue towards improving coordination and mobilizing resources for the implementation of the remaining issues related to the Doha Document, particularly with the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

The past three months have also witnessed a continued reduction in the number of intercommunal security incidents, in particular as a result of the more effective involvement of the native administration and the impact of security measures taken by State Governments, leading to an increased number of peace agreements, the implementation of which is supported by UNAMID. Seasonal disputes over access to land and resources during the migration and farming season have nevertheless continued.

According to figures provided by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 97,400 people were newly displaced in 2016. Of those, approximately 39,600 have reportedly returned, including some 25,500 who were verified and assisted in Golo, the centre of Jebel Marra. An additional 99,400 people remain unverified. We have not seen any new displacement in 2017. IDPs continue to recquire UNAMID protection and humanitarian assistance on a daily basis. Durable solutions to enable their return to their places of origin or reintegration have to be identified and should be the main priority of our collective efforts.

The cooperation of the Government of the Sudan has noticeably improved. Although UNAMID experienced intermittent movement restrictions during the reporting period, there has been significant improvement in that regard. In addition, UNAMID and the United Nations country team have repeatedly been able to visit areas in Jebel Marra that were previously off-limits. Our United Nations humanitarian partners are commencing regular helicopter flights to Golo. UNAMID remains focused on efforts to work with authorities of the Government of the Sudan to overcome the remaining access challenges. We have also seen some improvement in the issuance of visas and the clearance of essential equipment. However, delays in the clearance of UNAMID goods and equipment remain a concern, with some shipments pending since 2015.

The African Union, the United Nations and the Government of the Sudan are actively discussing how best to configure a strategy for UNAMID to eventually leave Darfur as part of constructive discussions within the joint working group. On 26 February, the joint working group met in Khartoum and referred its conclusions to the strategic tripartite mechanism, which will meet later this month. From 5 to 17 March, UNAMID received an African Union-United Nations strategic review team, which met with the Government of the Sudan in Khartoum and Darfur and travelled throughout Darfur. UNAMID awaits the outcome of these deliberations. However, without necessarily prejudging the outcome of the strategic review, I should like to say that, in view of the current circumstances in Darfur, a pragmatic reconfiguration of UNAMID will become necessary, and the AU and the United Nations will have to focus on how best that could be done without compromising the gains made thus far.

In conclusion, I would like to express UNAMID's appreciation to the Council for the support we have received. We continue to count on it as we continue to implement the mandate given to us by the United Nations and the African Union.

The President: I thank Mr. Mamabolo for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to the Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): Allow me to begin by expressing my condolences to the representative of the Russian Federation for the terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg yesterday that caused such senseless loss of life.

I should also like to wish you, Madam President, all the very best for your month in the hot seat, and thank you for your kind words about last month.

I would also like to warmly welcome and congratulate the Joint Special Representative on his

appointment. I thank him for the briefing that he has just given us.

Darfur is at a crossroads. Down one path lies the continuation of 14 years of conflict, bloodshed and impunity. It is a path that has forced 2.6 million people from their homes. It is a path littered with persistent violations of international humanitarian law, human rights violations and abuses, and persistent sexual and gender-based violence. It is a path that Darfur has simply been on for too long.

But there is another road to take, and in recent months we have seen a welcome absence of violence between the Government of the Sudan and opposition groups. We have seen the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) being granted access to areas that were previously cut. Vital humanitarian assessments are now under way.

Today, therefore, we need to send a clear message to the Government of the Sudan: choose the right path. Choose the path that will improve the lives of the people of Darfur. Choose the path to sustainable peace. Thats means tackling the culture of criminality and the banditry in Darfur. It means ending the abundance of small arms and light weapons, which are only adding fuel to the fire. And it means bringing to justice, domestically and through the International Criminal Court, all those who have carried out violence and who have failed to respect international humanitarian law and human rights — no matter their allegiance or their links to the Government.

In truth, Darfur will remain unstable and unpredictable so long as the root causes of conflict remain unaddressed. Let us therefore all encourage the Government of the Sudan to use the current cessation in the violence to shift its effortrs away from counter-insurgency and towards building sustainable peace. They will need the support of the Security Council and of the international community as a whole as they do so.

The first step has to be political. A political agreement between the parties to the armed conflict would not only secure a permanent cessation of hostilities, it would also be a significant step in addressing the drivers of intercommunal violence. We therefore call upon all parties to the armed conflict to engage meaningfully with the African Union High-level Implementation Panel for the peace process in order to secure a political agreement.

The second step towards a long-term solution is long-term access to Darfur. In order for UNAMID to fulfil its mandated duty to protect civilians, the mission requires unfettered access throughout Darfur — not just for a few days, or even for a few weeks, but on a sustained basis. The recent access is welcome, but it will count for little if it is not maintained. We are concerned that security agents of the Government of the Sudan continue to impose unnecessary access restrictions on UNAMID. That is particularly troubling when the mission is prevented from accessing vulnerable populations of internally displaced persons and those most in need. Let us insist today that UNAMID be given unrestricted access throughout Darfur, in order to enable the mission to fulfil its mandate effectively.

That brings me to my final point. As penholder on UNAMID here in New York, we believe that, if there is to be sustainable peace in Darfur, UNAMID must evolve with the security situation. The strategic review will be crucial in that respect, and we welcome the help of the Government of the Sudan for the visit by the strategic review team to Darfur. We are encouraged that they could visit all five states, including areas previously denied, such as Golo and Nertiti in Jebel Marra.

However, if UNAMID is to be adapted, as we hope, we all need to be confident that the Government of the Sudan is willing and able to protect its civilians in areas where UNAMID's presence is altered. That requires more than just unfettered and reliable access; it requires the Government of the Sudan to commit to the principle of operational flexibility for UNAMID and to commit to improving its own ability to protect civilians.

In conclusion, until the Government and the parties to the conflict take those steps, Darfur will remain at that crossroads. The people of Darfur cannot afford a wrong turn. They have suffered for too long. It is incumbent upon us all to ensure that the path chosen is the right one, and the one that will improve the lives of civilians and lead to sustainable peace.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Madam President, my delegation congratulates you and expresses its commitment to supporting you in your presidency of the Security Council. I also thank Ambassador Matthew Rycroft and the entire United Kingdom delegation for their outstanding presidency last month.

I also join others in expressing our condolences to our colleagues from the Russian delegation and to the

Government and the people of the Russian Federation in conneciton with the cowardly attack that took place yesterday in Saint Petersburg. We convey to them our full solidarity.

We thank Mr. Jeremiah Nyamane Kingsley Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), for presenting the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/250).

Uruguay would like to highlight the report's observations that there have been no significant armed clashes reported in Darfur for several months now and that, as compared with previous years, there have been fewer clashes between communities. It is important that the current calm in the armed conflict be maintained in order to halt violence against civilians and allow for conditions to emerge that are conducive to encouraging a secure environment for the voluntary return of internally displaced persons and communities.

We welcome the fact that the Government of the Sudan and the non-signatory movements to the Doha Document for Peace have maintained the unilateral ceasefire. We encourage them to resume direct talks, with a view to forging a formal agreement on the cessation of hostilities and humanitarian access, as well as to move swiftly towards political negotiations that can pave the way towards a lasting solution to the conflict.

I would like once again to underscore the key role played by UNAMID, in an operational environment that is far from free of difficulties. With regard to the issue of protecting civilians, we urge the mission to continue focusing on protecting internally displaced persons, who still number more than 2.6 million. We also urge it to concentrate on preventing and mediating local conflicts, including supporting reconciliation efforts and peace processes among the various communities.

With regard to the operational environment — from a systemic perspective — my colleagues on the Security Council will not be surprised to know that Uruguay is concerned any time that one State undertakes unilateral actions that interfere with the normal and proper functioning of a peacekeeping operation. In the specific case of UNAMID, we take note of the improvement in terms of issuing visas for staff and with regard to dispatching containers holding rations intended for UNAMID troops. Nevertheless, those are in fact obligations incumbent upon the State in order to facilitate the operation of the mission. We reiterate that, in line with the obligations assumed under the status-of-forces agreement, the Government of the Sudan must take the measures necessary to eliminate all bureaucratic impediments and to ensure that UNAMID has appropriate conditions in order to be able to fully comply with its mandate. That includes the points raised by the Ambassador of the United Kingdom: sustained, ununimpeded access to Darfur and all areas where the mission should be present.

In conclusion, allow me to convey Uruguay's gratitude to all UNAMID personnel, the United Nations country team on the ground and all humanitarian staff, who continue to work tirelessly, in often very difficult circumstances, in order to achieve lasting peace in Darfur.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): Let me start by congratulating you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. I wish to assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation. I would like to thank Ambassador Matthew Rycroft and his team for their very successful presidency. Much was achieved in March.

Before I proceed further, on behalf of my Government I would like very strongly to condemn the heinous and vicious terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg, as well as to express our solidarity with the people and the Government of the Russian Federation. We will always be second-to-none in our readiness to cooperate in the fight against this scourge. All can count on that.

I am very pleased to see our good friend and brother Ambassador Jeremiah Nyamane Kingsley Mamabolo, who did so much here at the United Nations when he was the Permanent Representative of his country. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate him on his appointment as the new African Union-United Nations Joint Special Representative/Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur. I also thank him for his informative briefing. I would also like to express our appreciation to his predecessor for his notable contributions.

The situation in Darfur continues to show marked progress as was acknowledged in the reports of the Secretary-General and the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015). Indeed, no major fighting has been reported since the beginning of this year, and the security situation has significantly improved. We commend the Government of the Sudan for extending the unilateral ceasefire for an

additional six months. The Council should continue to exert pressure on the armed movements to negotiate seriously ending the suffering of the people of Darfur and holding the spoilers accountable. The leadership of Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid should also be called upon to join the peace process in earnest without preconditions.

Of course, we all recognize that much remains to be done in addressing the root causes of the conflict in Darfur and ensuring long-term stability. In that regard, we appreciate that the Government established the Darfur Peace Follow-up Office and took forward the implementation of Doha Document for Peace in Darfur. Addressing the challenge of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is vital to bringing lasting peace to Darfur, and we note the efforts that are being taken in that regard, including facilitating the voluntary repatriation of IDPs. It is important that those efforts be supported by the United Nations and the international community in general.

The National Dialogue process is indeed a step in the right direction. We note that the Government has begun implementing the National Dialogue document, and we welcome the appointment of Barki Hasan Saleh to the post of Prime Minister. Support for the implementation of the National Dialogue is critical for sustainable peace and security to prevail not only in Darfur but in the Sudan, in general. Those outside the National Dialogue process able to exercise leverage on the parties should exercise pressure on them so that they join the implementation phase. The Government should also be encouraged to remain committed to ensuring inclusivity.

With regard to the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), we note the improvements made in connection with visas and customs clearance. Furthermore, the revision of the directives and procedures for humanitarian action in the Sudan by the Humanitarian Aid Commission eased the regulations governing the delivery of humanitarian aid as indicated in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/250). It is our hope that all remaining challenges facing UNAMID operations will be resolved through taking advantage of the existing arrangements.

We appreciate the personal involvement of the Secretary-General in resolving the impasse between the Government of the Sudan and the Secretariat concerning the way forward in implementing the exit strategy. That led to the finalization of the report of the joint working group following the successful meeting that the group held in Khartoum on 26 February and the commencement of the joint African Union-United Nations report on the strategic review. We look forward to receiving the report that we expect will take into account the outcome of the aforementioned joint working group meeting.

Finally, the Sudan has been playing a constructive role in dealing with peace and security issues in the region. The relationship between the Sudan and South Sudan is improving. The Sudanese Government has opened humanitarian corridors to deliver assistance to South Sudan. Although there are still a number of outstanding issues, the improvement of relations between the Sudan and South Sudan is indeed a welcome development. In the same vein, the Sudan's improved relations with Chad and Uganda are also very encouraging. The facilitation roles played by Presidents Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and Idriss Deby Itno in support of the Sudan's peace efforts are a testament to the confidence that the Sudan has recently achieved in its relations with those countries, and we hope that that will make a positive contribution to peace and stability in the region.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate the delegation of the United States of America on its accession to the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April. We wish you, Madam, every success. We appreciate the work of the United Kingdom delegation and its effective presidency of the Council during the month of March. I thank Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, Joint Special Representative for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), for his valuable briefing.

I would like to take this opportunity to offer the delegation of the Russian Federation our condolences and most vehement condemnation of the cowardly act of terrorism that claimed the lives of innocent civilians. We stand ready to support the Government and the people of the Russian Federation during this difficult time.

Over the past month, the situation on the ground in Darfur has seen major improvement, and security has improved. Our delegation has repeatedly stressed that the Security Council should change the way it addresses situation in Darfur to reflect those developments on the

ground. We should therefore focus on addressing the root causes of the conflict and seriously seek a final political settlement to the situation in the region that would ensure the humane and voluntary return of millions of internally displaced persons.

UNAMID has made outstanding efforts to establish peace in the region over the course of the years-long conflict. However, the Mission should not remain indefinitely without a deadline for the modification or termination of its mandate. That is impractical. We must achieve the formulation of a clear exit strategy for the Mission that corresponds with the improvement of the situation on the ground and the relative calm in Darfur. The Mission should focus on peacebuilding activities. In that regard, we reaffirm the role of the joint working group and the Tripartite Coordination Mechanism on Darfur as a main framework to explore the practical aspects of the exit strategy. At the same time, the improvement in the situation on the ground does not mean that challenges do not remain in the region.

Intercommunal violence and criminality, which are directly linked to the root causes of the conflict, must end. There must be reconciliation and the establishment of structures and institutions responsible for natural resources, as well as governance, economic and social development, the rule of law and the judicial system. UNAMID should focus on developing the region and rebuilding its institutions in cooperation with the United Nations country team.

On the political level, the necessary political support must be extended to the African Union High-level Implementation Panel chaired by former President Mbeki. Support must be given to the regional mediation efforts of the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Army. The different channels of negotiation need to be coordinated so as to avoid any duplication or conflict in carrying out its work and optimize progress in that regard. Moreover, it is dangerous for the international community to overlook the intransigeance of a number of armed opposition factions that refuse to join the peace process, through refusing to sign the road map — in particular, the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid faction. The Council must therefore shoulder its responsibility and seriously consider taking action against the leaders of the armed groups that are obstructing the political path and continue to refuse to join the political process.

In conclusion, Egypt reaffirms its support for UNAMID and the efforts of the Joint Special Representative, Mr. Jeremiah Mamabolo, to bring peace to Darfur.

Mr. Kawamura (Japan): At the outset, I would like to extend my hearty congratulations to you, Madam, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council during the month of April. Japan very much looks forward to working closely with you in the successful management of the Security Council.

I also express my deepest gratitude to Ambassador Rycroft for his splendid work at the helm of the presidency during the month of March. I join previous speakers in expressing our deepest condolences and sympathy to the people and Government of Russia, following the heinous terrorist attack that took place yesterday.

I thank Ambassador Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo for his informative briefing and congratulate him on his appointment as Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). Japan looks forward to continuing to work with him in his new capacity.

Japan is encouraged that there has been no major fighting in Darfur during the current reporting period. To avoid any relapse and to completely eliminate conflict, all parties must reach a permanent peace agreement based on the African Union High-level Implementation Panel road map. In that regard, we continue to support President Mbeki and the Joint Special Representative's good offices. We are also pleased with the Sudanese Government's improved cooperation with UNAMID and encourage further cooperation to enable the mission to implement its mandate with full freedom of movement. We understand that a new Government of National Reconciliation will soon be formed with the participation of a wider range of parties. The new Prime Minister of the Sudan stated that the new Government would make an effort to implement the outcome of the national dialogue. We strongly hope that the new Government will continue to play an active role in achieving more inclusive political participation.

Ongoing intercommunal violence should be addressed. Many of the root causes of that violence lie in conflict over resources such as water and land. We must support efforts made by the national and local Governments to address that issue, and we appreciate UNAMID's dedicated mediation and facilitation efforts. Japan, the African Union and UNAMID

recently completed a project to rehabilitate 100 natural water storage areas called rihoods. We believe that such projects can play an important role in addressing the root causes of conflicts.

We welcome the confirmation in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2017/250) that the humanitarian situation has improved in most of Darfur and that some progress has been observed in the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs). However, we must also recall the report of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs that there are still 3.7 million IDPs in Darfur. The problem is far from over. Support for the safe and voluntary return of IDPs should be prioritized with the utmost respect for the wishes of the IDPs. Japan believes that development assistance to consolidate peace in Darfur plays a major role in preventing the relapse into conflict and supporting the return of IDPs. To that end, we pledged an additional $4.3 million to United Nations agencies in January. It is particularly important that the people of Darfur experience peace directly.

There is no doubt that the situation in Darfur has improved, and the Council has the responsibility to review UNAMID's mandate accordingly. Japan looks forward to concrete recommendations after the strategic review on UNAMID's possible reconfiguration, as well as an assessment of progress and benchmarks. The time is right for the Council to reconsider how UNAMID can most effectively undertake vital tasks such as the protection of civilians, the safe and voluntary return of IDPs, the reduction of intercommunal violence and the strengthening of institutions and police capacity, in close coordination with the United Nations country team.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your country's assumption of the rotating presidency of the Security Council for this month. China looks forward to successful meetings of the Security Council under your leadership. I would also like to express our appreciation to the Ambassador of the United Kingdom and his team for their work during their presidency of the Council last month, and commend their efforts.

China strongly condemns yesterday's terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg that targeted civilians. We express our deepest sorrow about the lives lost. We extend our sincere condolences to the bereaved families and our best wishes to the injured. China is firmly against terrorism in all its forms. We stand in resolute support of Russia in combating terrorism and are ready to enhance counter-terrorism cooperation with the rest of the international community.

China thanks the United States of America for convening today's meeting. We have listened attentively to my good friend, Joint Special Representative Mr. Mamabolo. I would like to welcome Ambassador Mamabolo to his new capacity. China will actively support his work.

The current situation in Darfur is gradually improving. The Sudanese Government has announced a unilateral ceasefire in Darfur and made vigorous efforts to promote the peace process in an effort to maintain stability in Darfur and start reconstruction. China commends those efforts. The Darfur issue involves a multiplicity of factors such as the politicals security, development and humanitarian dimensions, and must be resolved in a comprehensive manner. Political settlement is both the foundation and the key. The international community must continue to support the mediation efforts of the African Union High Level Implementation Panel in order to provide immediate assistance to the Sudanese Government, the Darfur armed groups and opposition groups in implementing the road map agreement and resolve differences through dialogue so as to seek a sustained and peaceful settlement of the Darfur issue. We hope that relevant donors can actively honour their commitments and assist the Sudanese Government in enhancing infrastructure development in Darfur in order to improve local development capacity and achieve sustained economic and social development in the region.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of UNAMID's deployment. In the past 10 years, UNAMID has made tremendous efforts to promote the Darfur political process, maintain stability in Darfur and reconcile intercommunal differences. The United Nations, the African Union and the Sudanese Government hosted a joint working group meeting, which affirmed the progress achieved in the Darfur security situation and recommended the gradual withdrawal of UNAMID. China hopes that, while fully listening to the views of the Sudanese Government, the United Nations and the African Union can, on that basis, submit to the Council a report on a UNAMID drawdown.

The deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur is an innovative peace and security approach in Africa that was adopted

by the two parties. It provides enlightening guidance to the Council's approach to resolving flashpoint issues in Africa. It is now a consistent belief that the Security Council should support Africa in resolving African issues, the African way, by giving full play to the strength and role of the African Union and other regional and subregional organizations in Africa and, by carrying out results-based cooperation in relation to specific situations in Africa in order form a synergy. The United Nations peacekeeping operation must follow the changing dynamics and the will of the host country and adjust its mandate and size as appropriate. It will not just improve the mission's efficiency and efficacy; it can also concentrate limited peacekeeping resources on countries with greater needs in order to optimize resource allocation, in particular African countries, so as to provide tangible assistance in promoting peace and stability in Africa.

China has continued to support the Darfur peace process and is one of UNAMID's founding troop-contributing countries. The Chinese engineering unit was the first of the mission's peacekeeping troop contingents to arrive in Darfur to perform its duties. Over the years, it has made a sterling contribution to maintaining stability in Darfur and to developing the mission. China is ready to join the rest of the international community and continue to play a constructive role in restoring peace, stability and development in Darfur.

Mr. Sadykov (Kazakhstan): We would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of April, and to wish you every success. We are confident that under your leadership the Council will be able to make a breakthrough on many of the issues on its agenda.

We would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Russian Federation in the wake of yesterday's terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg. We want to convey our sympathy and sorrow to the relatives of the victims and wish those who were injured a speedy recovery.

We welcome the Joint Special Representative for Darfur and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), Mr. Mamabolo, and we are very grateful to him for his briefing today in his new capacity. My delegation would like to make the following observations in support of the mission's commendable work.

With the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/250) reflecting the real situation on the ground and showing that there has been considerable improvement in the security and humanitarian situation in Darfur, we are pleased to see that the number of armed conflicts between Government forces and insurgents has fallen, with fewer incidents of intercommunal clashes compared to last year. In that regard, we commend the Government's declaration on 15 January extending the unilateral ceasefire for another six months. Kazakhstan supports the inclusive political process being organized under the leadership of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and encourages every effort by all of the parties to fully implement the road-map agreement.

The decision to create a Government of National Reconciliation and a post of Prime Minister, as well as to reconstitute the composition of the National Assembly to make it more representative, is a step in the right direction. Respecting the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Sudan and the Government's ownership and leadership of the political process are crucial elements for establishing long-term peace and reconciliation in Darfur. We also commend the efforts of President Museveni of Uganda and President Deby Itno of Chad to resolve the crisis in Darfur, and we hope that the parties, including the United Nations, will benefit from their good offices.

Kazakhstan underscores the importance of the work of the tripartite group on the gradual drawdown of UNAMID and the transfer of its relevant functions to the United Nations country team. We welcome the general consensus that has been reached on the issue and hope that the so-called pending issues will be resolved by the next meeting. We have seen the important work being carried out by the joint strategic review mission, which visited Darfur from 15 to 17 March, to develop proposals for implementing UNAMID's exit strategy. Similarly, UNAMID's gradual reduction in personnel, based on the capability of the Government and the armed groups, should be conducted so as to ensure continued progress towards peace, and will require more effective and discerning spending of United Nations resources during the current period of economic stagnation. The report of the strategic review mission, which is expected in May, should give us more directives and reflect the relevant recommendations.

We also believe that the right-sizing of UNAMID should be implemented in parallel with the provision

of development assistance to the country, especially assistance in addressing the problems of internally displaced persons. We encourage donors to make good on their commitment to helping the vulnerable population through support to the development-peace nexus.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I would like to thank you, Madam President, and congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council. We feel we are in very good hands. I would also like to thank Ambassador Rycroft and his excellent team for a very effective presidency last month. Like everyone else, I would like to express our sympathies and condolences to my Russian colleague and to the Russian people, as well as our strong condemnation of the attacks in Saint Petersburg yesterday.

It is very nice to see my friend Ambassador Kingsley Mamabolo back in the Chamber, and I would like to thank him for the work he is doing on the ground and for his briefing today.

Conflict and instability have stalked Darfur for more than 13 years. In that time, several million people have been displaced, many have lost their lives and many more have sought shelter in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs), some for more than a decade. We now see a glimmer of hope. The consolidation of progress in some areas of Darfur, and the reports that the ceasefire is holding, is therefore very welcome. We now need to continue the steps towards consolidation and addressing the root causes of conflict.

Dialogue and diplomacy are the only guarantees of lasting peace and stability. The remaining armed groups, especially the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid, must be persuaded to join the peace process. We should all support the efforts of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel and of President Mbeki and other key regional actors, including President Museveni and President Deby Itno, in that regard. In addition, we welcome the efforts to implement the conclusions of the National Dialogue and the preparations for forming a Government of National Reconciliation. That process must remain flexible and open to further input and adjustment as a comprehensive agreement is developed.

Regarding the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID), we welcome the improvements in the Government of the Sudan's cooperation during the reporting period. We expect the remaining impediments to UNAMID's freedom of movement to be addressed as soon as possible. That is particularly important right now, as the Council needs a balanced assessment of the mission's effectiveness ahead of the renewal of its mandate in June. In order to ensure that the mission is appropriate to its context, the developments on the ground should be reflected in its next mandate. We welcome the fact that the Council will be able to consider input both from the strategic review and the joint working group when reviewing the mandate.

It is essential to take a holistic approach that addresses the current situation and longer-term development in Darfur, and it is therefore critical to ensure that the renewed mandate addresses how the United Nations as a whole can contribute to sustaining peace in the Sudan. The United Nations country team, together with UNAMID, must continue to identify areas where development cooperation can effectively and comprehensively address the root causes of instability, including through building effective institutions. It is important for UNAMID to have the capacity and the right operating conditions to enable it to focus on the remaining challenges, such as supporting the peace process, protecting civilians, addressing the situation of IDPs and monitoring, reporting on and advocating for the prevention of human rights violations.

We note with great concern the findings in the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/250) that human rights violations and abuses continue to be committed on a daily basis. We are particularly concerned about the 44 reported cases of sexual and gender-based violence, including cases involving children. In that regard, the joint efforts of UNAMID, the Office of the Resident Coordinator, the United Nations Development Programme and UN-Women to transfer tasks in the gender area from UNAMID to the United Nations country team are important. We encourage the United Nations system to continue addressing such issues and to report back, including in the light of the UNAMID mandate renewal.

We welcome the Government of the Sudan's continued commitment to implementing its action plan for ending and preventing the recruitment and use of children, and we encourage it to take the necessary measures to address the loopholes that have enabled the armed and security forces to recruit and use children.

Lastly, we need to be alert to tensions and challenges at the regional level, which are aggravated by drought and

refugee flows. We welcome the Sudan's recent positive engagement in South Sudan, including its facilitation of relief efforts by opening a second humanitarian corridor to the famine-stricken areas that will help to ensure that food assistance reaches those in need before the rainy season. It is also important to recognize that the Sudan itself is also feeling the effects of the drought. Lower than expected rainfall, exacerbated by the effects of the El Niño phenomenon, is resulting in food insecurity and water shortage across the greater region of the Horn of Africa. Addressing needs across borders will require a comprehensive regional approach that builds the resilience of individuals and communities throughout the region.

Mr. Lambertini (Italy): I would like to congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for the month of April. Of course, it is not the first ever United States presidency, but it is your first, so I wish you every success in what we hope will be a long list of successful presidencies of the Council. I would also like to thank Ambassador Rycroft and his team for their hard work in March during the brilliant British presidency. And I join others in expressing our condolences to the delegation of the Russian Federation in the wake of yesterday's senseless attack in Saint Petersburg. They can count on our Government's support.

It is a pleasure to welcome back Ambassador Mamabolo, whom we thank for his briefing and congratulate on his appointment as Joint Special Representative and Head of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). We are ready to work with him.

The situation in Darfur is changing rapidly and unevenly. Nevertheless, Italy's assessment of it remains clear and is based on three crucial aspects — the political and security dimensions; the root causes of instability in Darfur, starting with the humanitarian and human rights situations; and the strategic review of UNAMID.

First, with regard to the political and security dimension, in the past year the Sudanese Government has demonstrated its wish to find a political solution to the Darfur question, as attested to by the unilateral ceasefire and the pardoning of more than 250 rebels. This is further confirmed by Khartoum's signing of the road map and the willingness it has shown so far to negotiate with the non-signature parties on their association with the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur.

Despite the commendable efforts of President Thabo Mbeki, Head of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, which Italy supports, the non-signatory groups continue to delay. We renew our invitation to the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid to abandon military means and to join the political process, and we renew our call on the Sudan Liberation Army/Minni Minawi, the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North to sign the road map.

The time has come to assess the credibility of those who claim support for peace on the basis of their broad commitment to the pacification of Darfur through peaceful means and for achieving political solution. The Government must also persist in the approach it is taking. We hope that the implementation of the Doha Document can be rapidly completed, which could send a clear signal in the right direction on the part of Khartoum — one that the Council could not ignore.

Secondly, with regard to the humanitarian and human rights situation, despite progress made at the military level, peace continues to evade Darfur. The root causes of the instability have not been addressed yet. This scenario is not helped by the ongoing impediments that UNAMID has to face, despite recent, positive measures by the Sudanese Government. Darfur suffers from a lack of development. In this regard, my country will continue to do its part, helping the Sudanese Government at the bilateral level, as well as through programmes of the European Union and the United Nations. But there are other areas where the Government is called upon to act without delay: inter-community conflicts; banditry; human rights violations, including gender-based violence and military use of schools; impunity and the lack of accountability; attacks on internally displaced persons, such as recent episodes at the Sortony Camp in northern Darfur. Italy stongly condemns these crimes. There can be no solution to the problems that foment instability in Darfur without an inclusive, conciliatory and constant action led by the Sudanese Government.

In closing, with regard to the strategic review of UNAMID, the recommendations, which will be delivered to the Council by May, will provide us with options to discuss the continuation or the exit strategy of the mission. The Sudan has demonstrated a

constructive spirit in breaking the impasse in the United Nations-African Union joint review process. We attach great value to the collaborative approach of the Sudan and its involvement in the exercise. We also thank the Secretary-General for his personal contribution in this regard.

While waiting to receive and carefully assess the recommendations, we take good note, with a spirit of openness, of the assessments made in the Secretary-General's most recent report (S/2017/250). Improvements still need to be made in the political, humanitarian, security and rule of law areas, while progress has been achieved in meeting the benchmarks for a future phased drawdown of the mission.

Mr. Iliichev (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): Allow me to congratulate you, Madam President, as you begin your presidency of the Security Council. We wish you every success in this crucial role.

We would also like to express our gratitude for the solidarity shown in connection with the tragic events in Saint Petersburg yesterday. We appreciate the words of sympathy and support. The tragedy once again underscores the need for the international community to scale up its collective actions to counter the terrorist threat.

We thank Joint Special Representative Mr. Mamabolo for his briefing. We note the significant improvement in the security situation in Darfur. Not a single incident of clashes between the Government and the armed opposition was reported in any of the five states. At the same time, we are concerned about the ongoing intercommunal conflicts, rampant crime and attacks on internally displaced persons.

We welcome the measures taken by Khartoum to implement the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur, which includes the demobilization and reintegration of combatants. We support the Government's plans to organize the voluntary surrender of weapons, to successfully conclude the work of the Darfur Regional Authority, to create the general office for Darfur and a number of specialized commissions. We hope that the outcome of the work of the National Dialogue conference will serve to ensure national consensus and resolve the conflicts in Darfur, as well as in other parts of the country.

We welcome the extension of the obligations under the cessation of hostilities by the Government and non-signatories of the Doha Document, as well as the reciprocal release of prisoners in March. At the same time, it is alarming that, despite the signing by the Government of the Sudan and the armed opposition of the Mbeki road map, the peace process remains at a standstill. The Government can hardly be blamed for this. It is no secret that the August negotiations in Addis Ababa on the cessation of hostilities and ensuring humanitarian access in conflict areas fell apart because of rebels, in particular those who supported the unacceptable conditions of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North for the direct provision of assistance from abroad. It is telling that even the guarantees by the United States representatives on the fair distribution of humanitarian assistance were rejected by this armed group. In addition, we recall that the leader of the movement, Abdul Wahid Mohamed al-Nour has categorically refused any dialogue with the Government.

We believe that the foreign sponsors of the Sudanese opposition should more forcefully urge their protégés to act in a constructive manner and to give up their unrealistic demands. Effective means of bringing pressure to bear on the intractable opposition exist. Many of these individuals regularly travel to and organize events in certain Western countries. It would be a good idea to think seriously about the introduction of Security Council sanctions against these intractable groups.

We think it is impossible to achieve a full settlement in Darfur without resolving the issues of the camps of internally displaced persons. We note with concern the increase in crime in two of the largest camps, Sortony and Kalma. Furthermore, among the internally displaced persons, there are many supporters of the radical opposition and they are well armed. As members know, the Sudanese police do not have access to camps and the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) does not have a mandate to conduct relevant activities there. As a result, robbers, murderers and rapists go unpunished, and representatives from the Hybrid Operation risk their own lives to protect one of the parties to the conflict. We should think about how this situation could be rectified.

We note breakthroughs in resolving the problems facing UNAMID, including the issuance of visas and customs clearance for contingent-owned equipment. Progress has also been made in granting access. It is our understanding that the Government of the

Sudan is approving the vast majority of requests and negative responses are being given only when there is a security threat to staff. In the case of incidents with peacekeepers, blame could be laid only on Khartoum.

Recently, humanitarian workers were able to visit some areas of Jebel Marra. The Government issued new directives on procedures for humanitarian assistance to facilitate the movement of humanitarian staff. These aspects must be considered when coordinating with Khartoum. We also welcome the Government's decision to open new humanitarian corridors from El Obeid to the South Sudan area of Bentiu.

The work of the Tripartite Coordination Mechanism is helping to clear the obstacles to UNAMID. We call upon UNAMID and the Secretariat to continue this cooperation in order to dispel any remaining disagreements. With the positive trend in Darfur, we think the issue of the drawdown strategy of UNAMID is all the more relevant.

Progress in developing a UNAMID exit strategy also determines its relationship with the host country. Attempts to impede this process, let alone using UNAMID to put pressure on Khartoum, is unacceptable. Indeed, peacekeepers could be hostage to this type of political game. In this regard, we note the holding in early March of a joint strategic review of the mission's activities, conducted with the Secretariat and the African Union. We are pleased that this event was coordinated with the activities of the specialized joint working group. We stand ready to consider the proposals in the joint report of the Secretariat and the African UNion Commission for adapting the mission given the changing situation on the ground.

Mr. Lamek (France) (*spoke in French*): I, too, would like to begin by congratulating you, Madam President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. You can count on the full support of the French delegation. I would also like to pay tribute to the excellent manner in which the United Kingdom presided over the Council during the month of March.

I also wish to join others at this very difficult time in condemning the terrorist attack that took place in Saint Petersburg yesterday. As my President did yesterday, I too express our solidarity with the Russian people.

I also wish to thank Joint Special Representative Kingsley Mamabolo for his briefing, as well as to congratulate him on his appointment to the helm of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). My delegation wishes him every success in his new post. He can count on our continued and determined support.

This July it will have been 10 years since the Security Council established African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, which took over from the African Union Mission in the Sudan with the task of helping to restore peace and stability in Darfur following the atrocities that took place in the region in the early 2000s.

The Council must regularly assess the results of the operations it deploys. It is in that spirit that I visited the Sudan last week. I thank the Sudanese authorities for their welcome, and UNAMID for its support. The meetings I conducted in Khartoum and El Fasher, as well as visits to two camps in Darfur for displaced persons, were very useful for me to better understand the complex reality of the region, which the Sudanese authorities, along with UNAMID, face today.

My visit to the Sortony camp in particular enabled me to better understand the challenges in protecting civilians in Darfur. There has clearly been a decrease in the level of violence in some areas of Darfur, as noted in the recent reports of the Secretary-General. The decline in the intensity of fighting between rebel groups and Government forces is obviously encouraging news, and we welcome the decision made by the Sudanese Government in January to extend the ceasefire by six months. We again call on the rebel groups to do the same.

What is striking is that the displaced persons who found refuge at Sortony, in the foothills of Jebel Marra, are now facing a different sort of threat. Following the aerial bombardments in January 2016, and in the face of attacks by armed groups and militias, people had to flee their villages, settling around a UNAMID camp in a valley. The vast majority of them tell us they want to return to their lands but cannot because they are harassed by members of the militias and armed groups, who continue to commit abuses against civilians who leave the camp. On far too many occasions, women fall victim to rape as they collect firewood. As some of the displaced persons said clearly, they would have died if they had not been able to find refuge near the UNAMID camp. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the men and women of UNAMID who are

implementing the mandate to protect civilians. Their work is decisive in a place like Sortony. The more than 20,000 displaced persons in Sortony represent only a small percentage of the 2.6 million displaced people in Darfur. With a population of 7 million, that means one out of three people in Darfur are displaced. What we are seeing and hearing in Sortony should lead us to reflect on what action the United Nations should take on the ground.

The challenge in terms of security and protecting civilians from the armed groups and militias is certainly one of the main challenges faced by the Government of the Sudan and UNAMID. The return of displaced persons to their villages will be possible only when their security is assured in those areas. The Government of the Sudan must fully play its role in that regard, in accordance with its primary responsibility for protecting civilians, as has been consistently reaffirmed by the Council and earlier this morning by the Joint Special Representative. The international community, through UNAMID, can be a partner in that effort. To do so, UNAMID must be able to operate under good conditions. It must be able to benefit from the sound cooperation of the Sudanese Government in the exercise of its mandate.

During my visit, it became clear that the stability of Darfur, and more broadly that of the region, requires addressing the root causes of instability. We have all spoken of this in our statements up until now, but I wish to recall that among the causes are the proliferation of weapons, the plight of displaced persons, the handling of the issue of land and natural resources, the need to strengthen the rule of law and, of course, combating impunity, whether at the local and national levels or at the international level through the International Criminal Court. The country team contributes to promoting development in Darfur, often under difficult conditions, but it is clear that it cannot be the only partner of the Sudanese authorities in responding to these complex challenges.

From my discussions with the Sudanese authorities, both in Khartoum and El Fasher, and with the displaced and UNAMID, disarmament emerged as one of the most important current challenges. There is in fact a proliferation of weapons in Darfur. It is said that there are as many weapons in Darfur as there are inhabitants. Again, the international community can partner with Sudanese authorities to take a step in the right direction where the issue of disarmament is concerned. We therefore need to move forward in our collective thinking in order to find solutions that respond to these challenges.

We are committed to the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping, which is an essential tool for maintaining international peace and security. In view of the evolving challenges in Darfur, UNAMID will certainly need to evolve to provide the best response. In that context, we support the initiative of the Secretariat and of the African Union Commission to conduct a strategic review of UNAMID. That work should assess the effectiveness of UNAMID with regard to its goal of contributing to sustainable peace and stability in Darfur. We therefore look forward to the recommendations that will be made by the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, which will be based on the review assessment. It is on that basis that we can consider what adjustments can be made to UNAMID to allow it best to respond to the current peace and security challenges in Darfur.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): I wish to offer my best wishes to you, Madam Presidenet, as you take on the crucial role of Security Council President. I would also like to convey my very special thanks to Ambassador Rycroft and his team for the excellent way they conducted business doing the eventful month of March.

I would also like to express my condolences to the families of the victims of the terrorist attack that took place yesterday in Saint Petersburg.

I join others in congratulating Mr. Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo on his appointment as Joint Special Representative for Darfur. Ukraine fully supports his efforts aimed at advancing the achievement of peace in the Sudan. In the light of the information presented during Mr. Mamabolo's briefing, my delegation wishes to highlight the following points.

First, Ukraine welcomes the fact that the security situation in most parts of Darfur remained stable over recent months. Although no major fighting between Government forces and rebel groups has been observed as of late, attacks against internally displaced persons committed by armed militias continue to occur and must be halted immediately. We hope that the unilateral ceasefire declared by the Government of the Sudan and the non-signatory movements to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur will continue to hold. We also call on the Abdul Wahid faction of the Sudan Liberation Movement Army to refrain from military activity and

to join the peace talks. In that vein, we expect that all parties will continue to undertake genuine efforts aimed at preserving the positive momentum with a view to resolving critical issues related to the safe return of internally displaced persons and the renewal of peace talks.

That brings me to my second point, on the political process. There has been visible progress on the political track. The endorsement of amendments to the Constitution and the establishment of the Government of National Reconciliation and the post of Prime Minister, as well as the separation of the posts of Attorney-General and the Minister of Justice, are steps in the right direction. My delegation also notes the positive engagement by the Government and the Sudan Liberation Movement-North, which resulted in the mutual release of respective prisoners of war. We urge the Sudanese Government and the opposition parties to continue to implement the recommendations of the National Dialogue. Ukraine also looks forward to the resumption of talks facilitated by the African Union High-level Implementation Panel.

My third, and last, point is on the African Union-United Nations (UNAMID). Given that the situation in Darfur has evolved since 2015, we believe that the current mandate and tasks of UNAMID deserve close consideration. We look forward to the conclusions of the strategic review that was conducted by the joint African Union-United Nations team last month. The key priority in that regard should be to ensure the gradual transfer of tasks from UNAMID to the United Nations country team in the framework of peacebuilding efforts in Darfur. Meanwhile, we are concerned by continued restrictions and impediments to UNAMID's work, which include delays in the clearance of containers with equipment and supplies for the mission, as well as denial of access into some parts of Darfur. We call on the Government of the Sudan to remove these restrictions in line with its obligations under the status-of-forces agreement.

Finally, as Chair of the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005), concerning the Sudan, I remain committed to continuing to engage closely with the Government of the Sudan on issues within my mandate. I recognize the positive and constructive role in that regard played by the delegation of the Sudan in New York.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, Madam President, my delegation wishes to congratulate the United States on assuming the presidency of the Security Council this month. We wish you every success and pledge our cooperation. I would like also thank and congratulate the delegation of the United Kingdom and Ambassador Rycroft for having led the Council in March.

At the outset, Bolivia offers its most sincere condolences to the people and the Government of the Russian Federation for yesterday's terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg. As stated by President Evo Morales Ayma, Bolivia emphatically condemns that cowardly terrorist act, which claimed the lives of many and injured dozens. We convey our sympathy to the families of the deceased and wish the injured a speedy recovery.

My delegation warmly welcomes the appointment of Mr. Jeremiah Kingsley Mamabolo as Joint Special Representative for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID) and the African Union-United Nations Joint Chief Mediator. We have witnessed the leadership and professionalism of Ambassador Mamabolo, not only as his country's Permanent Representative to the United Nations but also when he was President of the Group of 77 and China in this Organization.

I should like to make the following brief comments.

Bolivia welcomes the good news that the situation in Darfur has taken a positive turn. As the Secretary-General's latest report (S/2017/250) indicates, there have been no serious conflicts over the past three months and hostilities in the Jebel Marra region have diminished considerably. We welcome the fact that the Government of the Sudan, the signatory movements to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur as well as non-signatory movements have all upheld the ceasefire. We urge the leaders of the non-signatory movements, especially the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid faction, to join the negotiations under way and work on a formal agreement that shows their commitment to stability and peace in Darfur.

In that connection, we encourage the efforts of the African Union High-level Implementation Panel, represented by former Presidents Thabo Mbeki and Abdulsalami Abubakar, to advance the peace process in Darfur. In that regard, we also take note of the steps taken by the Presidents of Uganda and Chad to foster

dialogue among the parties. Regional cooperation is fundamental to the political process.

Similarly, we would like to highlight the decrease in intercommunal violence. We recognize the efforts of the Government and UNAMID to promote understanding and reconciliation in order to reduce tensions between members of those communities. Nevertheless, despite such improvements, the situation of internally displaced persons remains a great concern. According to the Secretary-General's report, their number has not decreased. There are approximately 2.6 million people exposed to some form of violence, of which women and children are the most vulnerable and the most seriously affected.

We must support the plan of the Government of the Sudan for the voluntary resettlement of internally displaced persons. In that connection, we trust that the Government, consistent with the progress it has shown, will ensure the necessary support so that UNAMID can freely carry out its mandate of guaranteeing the necessary access to humanitarian actors so that they can verify and deliver humanitarian assistance.

As for the exit strategy and the transfer of UNAMID tasks to the United Nations country team, we welcome the efforts of the joint working group, whose recommendations, we believe, can be key in the joint African Union-United Nations report on the strategic review of UNAMID, to be submitted in May.

We also highlight the Sudanese Government's solidarity in alleviating the humanitarian crisis in South Sudan by opening up a humanitarian aid corridor from central Sudan to northern South Sudan, particularly in the areas of greatest conflict, such as Upper Nile and Bahr El Ghazal states.

Finally, my delegation pledges its support to the work of UNAMID and the United Nations country team with a view to achieving the main goal of lasting and sustainable peace in Darfur. We reiterate that the work and efforts of the Council must respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of the Sudan.

Mr. Seck (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, as my Government did yesterday morning, I would like to echo my delegation's firm condemnation of the terrorist attack in Saint Petersburg, which resulted in many deaths, numerous injuries and considerable property damage. Our sympathy, solidarity and condolences go out to the families of the victims and to the Government and the people of Russia. Senegal echoes the appeal just made by the Chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation for greater and more coordinated voluntary mobilization in the fight against terrorism, whoever its perpetrators.

On behalf of the delegation of Senegal, Madam President, I warmly congratulate you on your accession to the presidency of the Security Council. I assure you of our full cooperation. I also thank you, Madam President, for having convened this meeting on the important issue of Darfur. I also thank and congratulate Mr. Matthew Rycroft and his entire team for an active and productive presidency during the month of March. I am very pleased to see my dear friend and colleague Mr. Mamabolo, former Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations and current Joint Special Representative for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). His concise and clear briefing shed light on the situation, as did the Secretary-General's report (S/2017/250) and the report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005) (see S/2017/22).

Senegal wishes to pay well-deserved tribute to UNAMID, which has teams on all fronts in Darfur working to tackle the security challenges, support the political process and facilitate access to humanitarian aid. We also pay tribute to the troop-contributing countries for their commitment to peace in Darfur. I should recall that Senegal has deployed 800 military troops, two 140-person police units, eight observer officials and eight police officers — a total of 1,096 people.

As for the security situation, the delegation of Senegal welcomes the fact that the Government and several armed groups are respecting the ceasefire and the cessation of hostilities, with the notable exception of the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid faction. Such confidence-building measures must be commended and strengthened. Although there continue to be sporadic intercommunal clashes, their intensity, on the whole, has diminished.

The Senegalese delegation nonetheless wishes to deplore the numerous human rights violations reported in Darfur, which target in particular internally displaced persons (IDPs), women and children. We call for the voluntary and secure return of IDPs, which requires a safe environment and a long-lasting commitment by all parties to reconciliation and recovery. In that context,

my delegation welcomes the holding of the national dialogue and encourages the effective implementation of the recommendations arising therefrom so that the Government and the opposition can reach a common understanding so as to bring about a lasting solution to the conflict and a lasting peace.

Concerning the relationship between UNAMID and the Sudanese Government, we welcome the progress that has been made with regard to the issuing of visas and the releasing of containers, particularly those containing food rations. That is thanks to the efforts of the Sudanese authorities, which have, inter alia, appointed a focal point who will bear responsibility for these issues. That said, some containers remain held up in Port Sudan, which leads to difficulties for troop-contributing countries, my own included, in importing spare parts for key equipment. In order to alleviate this situation, we call for greater cooperation on the part of the Sudanese authorities so that these containers can be released.

With regard to transferring UNAMID tasks to the United Nations country team and the handover process, we look forward to seeing the joint report of the African Union and the United Nations on the strategic review that is under way, in particular as concerns ways of reconfiguring UNAMID, bearing in mind the positive evolution of events on the ground. It is in that spirit that the delegation of Senegal reiterates its support and extends once again its congratulations to UNAMID, to the United Nations country team and to the humanitarian personnel involved for the outstanding work they are doing in order to usher in lasting peace in Darfur.

It would be remiss of me to conclude without commending the work that the African Union High-level Implementation Panel is doing to promote the political process by facilitating direct, inclusive negotiations. We pay tribute to their outstanding mediator, President Thabo Mbeki — Mr. Mamabolo's compatriot — who held a very fruitful interactive dialogue with the Security Council last February, under the Swedish presidency.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

I wish to thank Joint Special Representative Mamabolo for his update on the activities of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). The Darfur mission was a lifeline when its peacekeepers deployed 10 years ago. In 2007, Darfur was one of the most brutal places on Earth. After four years of violence, more than 200,000 people were already dead, and 2.4 million people had fled their homes. Many people were stuck in refugee camps, petrified that Government-backed militias would murder them if they ventured out. The world looked to the Security Council to save lives. The mission answered the call.

The mission was never perfect; it was by far the most complex and most expensive peacekeeping mission in United Nations history, and the Sudanese Government has tried to obstruct it from day one. But against all of these odds, the mission has helped to protect civilians. Its peacekeepers deployed with great courage and bravery, and 63 UNAMID troops and police have paid the ultimate price. The United States is deeply grateful for the sacrifices that all of the mission's troop and police contributors have made.

But 10 years after the Darfur mission began its work, it is time to consider where Darfur stands today and what comes next. The Sudanese Government is still failing to protect its people in Darfur. In some areas, civilians are still at grave risk of widespread violence from Government-backed militias and armed groups. In other places, the Government does almost nothing to provide security when local disputes turn bloody.

The Council needs to see the Sudanese Government do far more to provide for its people by meeting the agreed-upon benchmarks for Darfur, supporting an inclusive peace process, protecting civilians and preventing community violence. It is not enough for the Government to promise to do better; we need to see proof.

It is also disheartening that the Sudanese Government is still obstructing the mission after all of these years. Over the past year, the Government held back hundreds of shipping containers of food, and the Darfur mission is still waiting for no fewer than 182 containers of its equipment to be released.

It is true that the Sudan has started processing United Nations paperwork faster and that it has improved humanitarian access for the United Nations and its partners. We welcome those changes. But the Government is not doing enough. The Government must grant freedom of movement to all peacekeepers and all aid workers. The Government must release all of the mission's equipment. It also has to grant visas for all United Nations officials, including human rights staff.

These are all demands the Council has made many times before. Council members need to stand by them.

Our long-term goal for Darfur is still the same: a negotiated, lasting peace. The United States welcomes the fact that both the Government and opposition groups have announced unilateral ceasefires. Both sides now need to turn these ceasefires into real progress towards peace talks, based on the road map that the African Union High-level Implementation Panel has laid out. We call on the Sudan Liberation Army/Abdul Wahid to immediately declare a unilateral cessation of hostilities and join the negotiations.

We also need to look at the Darfur mission's future. The situation in Darfur is still far from what we had hoped it would be 10 years ago, but Darfur today is changing. In many areas, the immediate threat of violence from Government confrontations with the armed opposition has passed. The people need the rule of law; they need police who will respect their human rights and protect them from criminals and militias; and they need help to mediate local disputes so that they do not flare up and spread.

So as the situation changes, the tools to prevent violence must change too. We need to ask if the mission to Darfur's current force structure and size are still appropriate. We might not need 17,000 uniformed troops to tackle these challenges. We need the United Nations to start using new tools, and we need the Government of the Sudan to step up.

So UNAMID should review its mission to ensure it still matches the conditions on the ground. This includes how the mission can reposition its forces to stop recurring violence and to quickly get to the areas where people need the help the most.

The mission's restructuring will also require the Sudanese Government to show that it is ready to govern all areas of its territory and protect all of its citizens. The Government will need to work with the United Nations as a partner to build local institutions and to provide basic services.

We have the benchmarks, so we need to assess the Government's progress based on them and be honest in our evaluation. If the Government believes that it is ready to govern, it needs to show us. The expectations are well known. We need progress on an inclusive peace process. Civilians must be protected and humanitarian access unhindered, and we need to see conflict within communities addressed through mediation.

For each one, we expect that the Secretary-General's reports will clearly spell out where Sudan meets these benchmarks and where it does not, and we expect that all of us on the Council will be just as diligent in tracking that progress. If the Government falls short, the Council has a responsibility to act. The Council has to be willing to criticize and call out the Government in our statements and when we review the peacekeeping mission's mandate, in June.

Helping the people of Darfur means that we need to see change. Above all, the responsibility rests with the Sudan's Government. We can and should reconfigure the mission to Darfur to make it more effective, but what will really bring peace to Darfur is holding the Government accountable. The Sudan's leaders must disarm the militias that still terrorize Darfur's people. They must support United Nations peacekeepers and staff in accomplishing their missions, and they must commit not just in words but in deeds to building sustainable peace for Darfur's people. I look forward to working with all participants in the coming months to help bring about these changes.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I now give the floor to the representative of the Sudan.

Mr. Mohamed (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like at the outset to express my condolences to the Government and the people of the Russian Federation in connection with the terrorist act in Saint Petersburg and to condemn this cowardly act in the strongest terms.

I would like to congratulate you, Madam, on your appointment to the position of Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations and for your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council during the month of April. I assure you of my delegation's readiness to cooperate with you, Madam President, to carry out your presidency's mandate. Furthermore, I would like to express our thanks and appreciation to the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom for his delegation's outstanding presidency of the Security Council during last month. I also thank the Secretary-General for his substantial report (S/2017/250). And I congratulate Ambassador Mamabolo on his appointment to the position of Joint

Special Representative for the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur (UNAMID). We stand in full agreement with his briefing on the situation in Darfur, as the Darfur of today is not the Darfur of 2003. Moreover, I commend the high level of cooperation between peacekeeping management and UNAMID, on one hand, and the Government of the Sudan, on the other hand. Such is the level of cooperation to which we have been aspiring over past reporting periods, and especially since 2007.

The report of the Secretary-General underscores the progress achieved in Darfur during the latest reporting period and notes the unprecedented stability in terms of security owing to the efforts of Government forces to securing the state of Darfur and ending clashes attributable to certain armed movements. That has had a positive impact on the situation in terms of security and stability in the various states of Darfur, with the exception of a few enclaves in the country. In the report, we note that the Jebel Marra is mostly secure, except for a few pockets in which remnants of the rebel faction of Abdul Wahid are positioned. The adhesion of many of the leaders of that movement to the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur was of great importance.

Owing to the efforts that were carried out by the Government and regional partners, a number of the opposition factions became signatories to the Doha Document. The Government's six-month extension of the ceasefire demonstrated its serious intentions to revive the peace process and end violence in that area of the country and begin rebuilding and development. In all our statements addressed to the Security Council, we have reiterated the determination of the Government of the Sudan to revive peace throughout the country. Furthermore, we have stressed that it is very important that the international community exert pressure on the opposition movement, as it obstinately continues to refuse to sign the peace agreement despite defections. The leader of the rebel movement, Abdul Wahid, continues to receive support, which only serves to encourage his intransigence and refusal to sign the peace agreement. That disadvantages other movements and prevents them from seriously negotiating a lasting peace and ending human trafficking and mercenary activities. All of those points were mentioned in the report by the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 2206 (2015) in February.

With regard to internally displaced persons (IDPs), we should acknowledge that the movement of all the IDPs in 2016 — I am happy to say that we have not witnessed any IDP movement in 2017 — was the result of Abdul Wahid's determination and insistence to resort to armed violence.

The humanitarian situation in Darfur is a major concern for the Government of the Sudan, not to speak of the increasing number of returning IDPs. Moreover, the continuing presence of IDP camps in Darfur following the breakthrough in peace, stability and security is unjustifiable, especially as the peace partners in Darfur have made considerable efforts to prepare and equip villages for their voluntary return, through providing all their basic needs as well as restoring security in the IDPs' villages of origin. International efforts therefore should continue to encourage IDPs to voluntarily return, and the Government of the Sudan developed a plan based on three options. The first option involves the voluntary return of IDPs to their villages — and I stress the word "voluntary". The second option is to integrate IDP camps into neighbouring cities after ramping up their latter's capability to provide them with basic needs and services. The third option provides IDPs with the freedom to choose the area in which they would like to be relocated, especially in Darfur.

The implementation of any one of those options lacks the financial resources and the technical expertise, as well as the international community's cooperation. Again, it requires the cooperation of it international community. In that regard, I would like to commend the assistance offered by Qatar, the Leauge of Arab States and other friendly countries ,such as China, Japan and others in the framework of the Doha Document, which was front and centre as the primary document recognized by the Security Council. We must reiterate that the Document is critical to peace, and we are not here to call for a new agreement. However, we must make every effort to commit to the Document, which is at the core of the peace process that was initiated by the Security Council. We call for the implementation of the Doha Document, which should be followed up by the establishment of an international commission including the Security Council members and the peace partners.

If the implementation of Doha Document fails, any such failure should therefore be referred to the committee that meets every six months. That is one of the very positive points that we found in the Document. It also provides a window of time for the international community to follow up on developments every six months. Accordingly, I also refer members of the

Council to all the recommendations of the committee. The committee meets every six months in Khartoum and Doha.

The significant improvement in the security and humanitarian situation in Darfur and the reduction of activity by the rebel groups, as mentioned in the Secretary-General's latest and previous reports, as well as the report (see S/2017/22) by the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005), serve to underscore that what the Government of the Sudan had been calling for since 2014 was justified, namely, the need to establish a strategic plan to phase out UNAMID in Darfur. Moreover, developments in the situation demonstrate daily that UNAMID is no longer the appropriate framework for security engagement by the international community, because our main focus — especially with regard to Darfur — should now be on development. I recall that the Sudan — or, rahter, Darfur — is a least developed country. We must realize the need for inclusive development, including its economic, social and environmental dimensions. In that regard, we refer to the important role that should be played by the international community on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the former combatants. All of those tasks could be undertaken by the United Nations country team, as long as the international community provides the necessary financial and humanitarian assistance.

My country's delegation hopes that the recommendations put forward at the most recent meeting of the joint working group, held on 26 February, will be considered in order to develop a strategy for the phasing out of UNAMID — a gradual exit strategy. That should serve as an example for other United Nations peacekeeping operations.

The Sudan has consolidated its regional and international partnerships in areas of vital importance for the international community, in particular counter-terrorism, illegal immigration, regional peace efforts and humanitarian assistance. You, Madam President, are also aware of how far the cooperation between the Sudan and your own country has come. As I speak here before the Security Council, my country is hosting a conference for African directors of intelligence services on counter-terrorism efforts on the African continent.

With regard to humanitarian issues, the Sudan has continued to cooperate with the international community. The Government of the Sudan agreed to a proposal that was made by the United States regarding humanitarian access to South Kordofan and Blue Nile states. That same proposal, however, was refused by the rebels. The Sudan has also consolidated its role in providing relief to South Sudan.

All of those developments prove that the Sudan is an effective member of the international community and a reliable partner. It is therefore incumbent upon the international community to cooperate with the Sudan.

Finally, we would like to thank UNAMID for its efforts in the various areas. We would also like to thank the troop- and police-contributing countries. We reiterate the readiness of the Government of the Sudan to cooperate with all regional and international partners on the UNAMID mission, until the very last UNAMID components leave the Sudan after completing their mandate. Peacekeeping missions should not be deployed indefinitely. If the mandate is finalized, it means that peace has been restored.

The President: Before concluding, I would like to say that we all stand unified in our sympathy for the people of Russia following the attack on Saint Petersburg. We stand with the families and hope that we can find those who perpetrated that heinous act. We support them through that process.

We have all seen the reports of the terrible chemical-weapon attack in Syria. In my capacity as President, I would like to inform the Security Council that the presidency intends to convene a meeting in briefing format here, in open Chamber, tomorrow at 10 a.m. to discuss the attack. We will move our briefing and consultations on Colombia to the afternoon so that we can hold that emergency meeting. We hope to get as much information on the Syrian attack as we can.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.

United Nations S/PV.7913

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7913th meeting

Tuesday, 4 April 2017, 11.55 a.m.

New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Yu Peng
	Egypt	Mr. Kandeel
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Lamek
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Kawamura
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Vitrenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez

Agenda

The situation in the Central African Republic

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council. Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-08899 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.55 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Central African Republic

The President: The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The Council has before it the text of a statement by the President on behalf of the Council on the subject of today's meeting. I thank Council members for their valuable contributions to this statement. In accordance with the understanding reached among the members of the Council, I shall take it that the members of the Security Council agree to the statement, which will be issued as a document of the Security Council under the symbol S/PRST/2017/15.

The meeting rose at noon.

United Nations S/PV.7914

Security Council

Distr.: General
4 April 2017

Original: English

Official communiqué of the 7914th (closed) meeting of the Security Council

Held in private at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 4 April 2017, at 3 p.m.

In accordance with rule 55 of the provisional rules of procedure of the Security Council, the following communiqué was issued through the Secretary-General in place of a verbatim record:

"On 4 April 2017, the Security Council, pursuant to annex II, sections A and B of resolution 1353 (2001), held its 7914th meeting in private with the troop- and police-contributing countries to the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti.

"The President invited Ms. Sandra Honoré, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti, to participate in the meeting in accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

"The Security Council and the troop- and police-contributing countries heard a briefing by Ms. Honoré.

"Members of the Council, Ms. Honoré and representatives of participating contributing countries had an exchange of views."

17-05441 (E) 050417

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United Nations S/PV.7915

Security Council

Seventy-second year

Provisional

7915th meeting

Wednesday, 5 April 2017, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mrs. Haley	(United States of America)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Italy	Mr. Cardi
	Japan	Mr. Bessho
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Senegal	Mr. Seck
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	Ukraine	Mr. Yelchenko
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 March 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/260)

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. The final text will be printed in the *Official Records of the Security Council*. *Corrections* should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (http://documents.un.org).

17-09075 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Letter dated 27 March 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/260)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Kim Won-soo, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Kim Won-soo.

Mr. Kim Won-soo: I would like to thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to brief the Council on the Syrian chemical file, undertaken in furtherance of Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2235 (2015) and 2319 (2016). But I will do so with a heavy heart.

Since yesterday morning, I have been in close contact with the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). I also met with the chargé d'affaires of the Syrian Arab Republic in New York.

I will first brief the Security Council on the most recent reported use of chemical weapons, in Khan Shaykhun, in Idlib, Syria. At this point, information is still coming in. Currently, details about the attack are not fully known, but, according to the most recent media reports, a chemical attack may have caused the deaths of at least 70 civilians, with perhaps more than 200 injured. Both the Secretary-General and the OPCW Director General issued statements expressing grave concern about these reports and reiterating their condemnation of any chemical-weapons use.

I have been in close contact with the Director-General since the first reports came in yesterday. He informed me that the OPCW Fact Finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic is actively engaged in gathering and analysing information from all available sources and will be prepared to deploy a team at the earliest opportunity.

If confirmed, this would constitute the single largest chemical-weapons attack in the Syrian Arab Republic since the attack on eastern Ghouta, in August 2013. Reports have stated that the attack was carried out through an airstrike on a residential area. However, the means of delivery of the alleged attack cannot be definitively confirmed at this stage.

Reports have also indicated that the presentation of symptoms after the attack included respiratory problems, vomiting, fainting and foaming at the mouth, as well as miosis, or pupillary constriction. This was visible in videos on social media said to have been taken at the scene of the attack.

During my discussions yesterday with the chargé d'affaires of the Syrian Arab Republic, he stated that his Government denied having used chemical weapons in this attack or any other attack.

I would like now to turn to my monthly briefing on work regarding the Syrian chemical file.

First, on destruction, for the last three years following Syria's initial declaration, all declared chemical materials and equipment have been removed or destroyed. Four hangars and seven tunnels have been disabled. One hangar and two above-ground stationary facilities remain subject to verification of their disablement.

This work is still pending, mainly due to the prevailing security situation around these facilities. For this work to be complete, the OPCW, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Nations Office for Project Services extended the tripartite agreement until the end of this year.

Secondly, on the declaration assessment, for the past three years the OPCW has worked with the Syrian Arab Republic to assess and verify the declaration. A number of outstanding issues related to Syria's declaration still remain open. The high-level consultations between the OPCW and the Government of Syria to address these unresolved issues will resume in The Hague in early May.

The first OPCW inspection at the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) took place

starting last February. During this inspection, OPCW inspectors took samples, which are now being analysed by OPCW-designated laboratories.

Thirdly, on investigations into alleged chemical attacks, the OPCW Fact Finding Mission is looking at a number of incidents that have taken place over the past several months. It is in the process of finalizing its reporting, and this should be done in some weeks' time. Should any Fact Finding Mission report conclude that an incident involved or likely involved the use of toxic chemicals as weapons, it will provide the basis for the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) to begin its work to attribute responsibility for their use.

The investigative capacity of the JIM is now operational. It is based in The Hague owing to the obvious need for it to work closely with the OPCW teams. It will be fully ready to begin its work as soon as the Mission reaches its conclusions. The political and other support structures of the JIM in New York are likewise operational, with a liaison presence in Damascus soon to be established.

As has been done in the past, I expect that all members of the Security Council, and all Member States in a position to do so, will provide information and access to both the Mission and the JIM in order to facilitate the collection of evidence for the establishment of facts.

The Secretary-General is deeply disturbed by the continuing reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Khan Shaykhun and elsewhere in Syria. The Secretary-General recalls that the Security Council has repeatedly determined that the use of chemical weapons anywhere constitutes a threat to international peace and security as well as a serious violation of international law.

With this determination, the international community has made tremendous efforts, symbolized by three consecutive joint missions of the OPCW and the United Nations over the past four years, to stop the impunity for chemical-weapons use from growing any further.

Despite these efforts, however, it is profoundly disturbing to witness the tragic consequences of the continued use of chemical weapons on innocent civilians. We are grateful to the Security Council for addressing this issue with unity, including through the creation and renewal of the JIM.

On our part, we would like to reassure the members of the Security Council that the OPCW and United Nations secretariats will provide every possible support to the work of both the Fact-finding Mission and the JIM so that these missions will discharge their mandates in an independent, impartial and professional manner. We look forward to the deliberations of and continuing guidance from the Security Council.

The President: I thank Mr. Kim Won-soo for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to begin by thanking the United States presidency for agreeing to our request to convene an emergency meeting of the Security Council and to congratulate you, Madam, on your accession to the presidency. I also thank Mr. Kim Won-soo for his briefing and his efforts over the past two years as High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

After six years of conflict in Syria, marked by the most appalling violence against the civilian population, and in particular by the prolonged and repeated use of chemical weapons — in particular chlorine gas — by the Syrian regime against its own people, we awoke yesterday to learn yet again that an ignoble attack had just been committed at Khan Shaykhun, south of Idlib. This can only remind us of the terrible day of 21 August 2013, following the chemical attacks by the regime in Ghouta, a suburb of Damascus, whose unbearable images haunt our memories.

This chemical horror, which is hardly new and should therefore surprise no one, marks the latest phase of the Syrian tragedy's descent into the abyss. The facts are extremely shocking and extremely serious. Once again, lethal toxic substances have been used and released from the air. The sordid outcome is now over 100 people killed by asphyxiation, including more than 10 children, and there will undoubtedly be more victims. The symptoms reported by those on site and visible in the images of the attack are not characteristic of chlorine but suggest the use of a much more aggressive substance. This is the most deadly incident of violence since the large-scale attacks by the Syrian regime in

August 2013 in Ghouta, where more than 1,000 people have lost their lives.

France, through its highest authorities, has firmly condemned this carnage, which is further proof of the barbarity that has stricken the Syrian population for several years. While some claim that what occurred was a strike against a chemical weapons depot belonging to the "terrorists", I would like to recall three simple facts. First, there was no conflagration, while such a strike would have caused a fire whose consequences would have been far more serious for civilians. Secondly, the incident occurred in an area where the Syrian army and air force are currently active; moreover, new strikes were observed in the Idlib area yesterday. Lastly, the responsibility of the Syrian air force has already been irrefutably called into question for the use of chlorine as a chemical weapon at least three times by the conclusions of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, mandated by the Council.

Yesterday's atrocities, which constitute war crimes, come in addition to new suspicions of chlorine use late last month and the multiple cases reported over several months, in particular in Aleppo in December 2016. They tragically illustrate the self-destructive folly of the Bashar Al-Assad's regime that even its supporters — as we have seen today — are unable to prevent, and whose silence is tantamount to endorsing these barbaric acts. This new outbreak of violence confirms that until there is a credible political transition, no one can guarantee the peace and security of the Syrian people or the return to stability in the Middle East. We must therefore set in motion without delay the political transition that the Council sought and approved by unanimously adopting resolution 2254 (2015) and the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex). That has been France's position from the very outset.

All light must be shed as soon as possible on the details of this shameful massacre. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) immediately addressed these allegations. My country fully supports the OPCW's Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic and the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism to enable them to investigate as soon as possible. All allegations of chemical weapons use must be duly investigated and monitored.

But that, of course, is not enough. Those responsible for these attacks answer for their deeds and be brought to justice. It is high time for the international community to put an end to the crimes of the Syrian regime. No political alliance can justify turning a blind eye to mass atrocities, procrastinating, equivocating or diverting the world's attention to other tragedies — in short, denying the evidence.

Russia, as the guarantor of the ceasefire established on 29 December 2016 and as a permanent member of the Security Council, has a special responsibility that it must now assume, alongside all members of the Council. That is why France, the United Kingdom and the United States have taken the initiative to introduce a draft resolution that we hope will unite the international community around a clear, firm position rejecting the unacceptable.

Faced with evidence of the repeated, methodical and barbaric use of weapons of mass destruction — in this case chemical weapons — against civilian populations, inaction and paralysis cannot be options. Our collective credibility as the guardians of international peace and security and as individual States committed to fighting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is at stake. This is a question of respect for international humanitarian law and our ability to restore a collective norm that has been openly flouted — the ban on the use of chemical weapons against civilian populations, which the international community sought to prohibit for all time almost a century ago.

We have a collective responsibility to protect the chemical non-proliferation regime that had been the subject of a responsible consensus in the Council until now, but which is disintegrating today before our very eyes. The risk is that all the non-proliferation regimes we have patiently built together, day after day, over the recent decades will fall apart with it. The re-emergence of these weapons in Syria, including in the hands of Da'esh, while the international system fails to react sends a signal of impunity that is extremely dangerous and not acceptable. All of Syria's chemical capacities must be dismantled in order to protect the Syrian people and our collective security.

Out of this fog of uncertainty emerge moments of reality when we can no longer prevaricate or shirk our responsibilities. The very bases of our values, the law and our security are at stake. As to our values, who would fail to condemn those who have murdered

women and children in cold blood and in such abject and horrendous circumstances? Is this not the very negation of civilization in its entirety? As to the law, the Security Council unanimously agreed to condemn those responsible for these deaths by chemical weapon. What are we waiting for to apply the law that we ourselves helped to formulate? As to our security, if we close our eyes to the use of chemical weapons against civilians, what legitimacy will we have in future to condemn nuclear terrorism or a potential bacteriological apocalypse? Who will be ready to assume that kind of responsibility in the face of history?

Just a few weeks ago, I called on all of us here to take stock of and assume their responsibilities (see S/PV.7893). Let us make no mistake: the lack of consensus in the Security Council on 28 February to sanction the proven use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime was, unfortunately, a clear signalling of impunity. The despicable massacre in Khan Shaykhun is a terrible reminder of reality and of our responsibility. The time has therefore come for us to act collectively, with a sense of conscience and all the necessary firmness, in the face of the use of weapons of mass destruction. I would like to express the hope that we can at last join together to reiterate collectively our rejection of the use of chemical weapons. The world is watching us — and in particular watching those who would protect an indefensible regime, and who would be complicit for this most heinous crime.

Mr. Rycroft (United Kingdom): On 28 February (see S/PV.7893), I asked a simple question of the Security Council, namely, would we take action against those who used chemical weapons in Syria? We had a chance that day to adopt a draft resolution (S/2017/172) that would have done exactly that — a draft resolution that would have taken action against the Al-Assad regime and against Da'esh, proven to have used chemical weapons by the mechanism that we set up. We could have sent a clear message that day, a clear signal that there would be consequences for using these horrific weapons and for violating international law, a clear signal that there was Security Council unity, global unity, against any use of these weapons. But after Russia and China vetoed the draft resolution, it seems that the only message sent to Al-Assad was one of encouragement.

Yesterday we saw the consequences of those vetoes. Those consequences are painted on the stricken faces of the children of Khan Shaykhun, killed potentially by a regime that will stop at nothing to hold on to power. History will judge all of us for how we respond to these unforgettable, unforgivable images of the innocent, who had already suffered so much even before yesterday's attack. How long are we going to sit here and pretend that actions in this Chamber have no consequences, that vetoes have no bearing on the lives of innocent men, women and children?

Russia has said that the opposition is responsible, that a regime airstrike struck an opposition munitions depot. But we have seen nothing to suggest that any non-State actors in Syria have the sort of chemical weapons that would be consistent with the symptoms that we saw yesterday. Russia will say simply that we do not have enough information about the attack. And yet we have every indication that this was a sustained attack using aircraft over a number of hours. We see all the signs of an attack using a nerve agent capable of killing over 100 people and harming hundreds more. If that is not enough to demand action, what is? There is only one air force that has used such weapons in Syria. There is only one party to this conflict that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) says has "gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies" in its Chemical Weapons Convention declaration. Only one party still refuses inspectors access to its facilities. This does not look like the work of terrorists. This does not look like the work of the opposition. This bears all the hallmarks of the Al-Assad regime, and the use of chemical weapons is a war crime.

Make no mistake: this regime seems intent on making a mockery of the Russian-backed ceasefire. Russia has blocked Council action, claiming that we might undermine the Astana process. Yet the only thing undermining the Astana process is Al-Assad, the very man they seek to protect. Russia deployed the full weight of its armed forces to help him. They reduced Aleppo to ruins and displaced hundreds of thousands of men, women and children — all in the name of fighting terrorism. And what does Russia get as repayment? Al-Assad humiliates Russia in the eyes of the world by intensifying his attacks and by reducing the Astana ceasefire to ruble. Al-Assad humiliates Russia by showing just how empty Syria's promise was to remove all its chemical weapons.

If Russia is to restore its credibility, it will need to join us in condemning this attack and in urging the OPCW to investigate it as soon as possible. They will join us in calling for the fullest support and cooperation

for the investigation team. They will help, not hinder, our efforts to strengthen accountability through the vital work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. There can be no further delay in staffing the leadership of the Mechanism. It must have the right technical and analytical capacity to take on the task ahead. If Russia fails to do so and falls back on its old ways, defending the indefensible, we will not be deterred. The United Kingdom, with our allies, will continue to seek justice for the victims of chemical-weapon attacks, in Syria and elsewhere. We will continue to pursue other avenues for action. The European Union sanctions announced last month against Syrian military persons show that we can still take steps to hold individuals to account, that we can still show that the use of chemical weapons brings consequences.

But until Russia changes its ways, the Security Council will remain blocked. That is the sad reality that the world has gotten used to. They view us as a table of diplomats doing nothing, our hands tied behind our backs, beholden to Russian intransigence. But the world should be under no illusion. What Russia does in this Chamber does not cause inaction; defending the indefensible causes suffering. Each and every abuse of its veto has consequences. For the people of Khan Shaykhun, those consequences have been unspeakable.

Let me conclude by asking Russia: what is its plan to stop these horrific, senseless attacks? We had a plan and we had the support. They rejected it to protect Al-Assad. It is now time to stop blocking and start helping, by joining Security Council consensus. Our draft resolution condemns this attack and calls for consequences. All 15 Security Council members should be able to confirm this and every use of chemical weapons. We expect members' unanimous support.

Mr. Llorentty Solíz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Security Council is meeting today in the face of a horrific event. The Plurinational State of Bolivia expresses its strong condemnation of the use of chemical weapons and the use of chemical agents as weapons — justifiable and criminal acts regardless of the reason behind them, whenever and by whomever committed. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons must be duly investigated, tried and punished to the fullest extent. The use of chemical weapons is a violation of obligations established under international law as well as a threat to international peace and security. Bolivia demands an independent, impartial, comprehensive and conclusive investigation that is completely depoliticized. In that regard, we reiterate our support for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations-OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism in ensuring that, in line with their mandates, they can carry out the tasks I mentioned.

We also express our vigorous condemnation of any type of attack against innocent civilians or civilian infrastructure in this or, indeed, in any other conflict. We reiterate the obligation incumbent upon all parties to ensure the safety and security of persons caught in the middle of the conflict. We reiterate that the use of chemical weapons is a serious crime against international security. We also express our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims and the Syrian people while encouraging them to continue their efforts to finding a lasting peace.

With regard to the note submitted on 23 February by the Director-General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on the verification process of chemical weapons in Syria, we appreciate that its secretariat "verified the destruction of 24 of the 27 chemical weapons production facilities declared by the Syrian Arab Republic" that could have produced chemical weapons. We hope that the security situation in Syria will improve and allow for the verification of the remaining facilities. According to the same report,

"all of the chemicals declared by the Syrian Arab Republic that were removed from its territory in 2014 have now been destroyed".

We therefore underscore the willingness and readiness expressed by the Syrian Government to comply with its international obligations. We also welcome the fact that the Joint Investigative Mechanism continues to strengthen its operational capacity in reopening its office for research at OPCW headquarters and that it carries out its work in the most methodical, technical and trustworthy way possible.

Bolivia calls for the unity of the Security Council so that the Council Chamber is not used as a sounding board for war propaganda, so that that the international community can look upon it with confidence and so that it not be used as a pawn in planning for war. Only investigations will determine the responsible parties, and we believe that the most responsible way to proceed is not to prematurely determine who is responsible for those acts but to ensure an independent, impartial, comprehensive and conclusive investigation.

Finally, I would like to underscore the words of the Secretary-General, who has reminded us that Syria has undergone seven years of war marked by the increasing suffering of the Syrian people. We believe that it is incumbent on the Council to recall at present and forever the causes of that terrible war. We would probably not be sitting here and lamenting the seven years of war and suffering of the Syrian people had it not been for the invasion of Iraq more than 10 years ago in the context of interventionist policies in the Middle East. I believe that it is a universal responsibility for those who committed such crimes to also assume their historical responsibility. We believe that it is imperative to recognize that interference, interventionism and that policy of regime change undermine all civilizations established by the various peoples of the world. We naturally regret and are saddened and moved by the loss of life, but we once again stridently call for the unity of the Council and for it to be used not as a sounding board for war propaganda but as a place in which we debate and agree on the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Liu Jieyi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China is profoundly shocked by the alleged use of chemicals as weapons in Syria that resulted in enormous civilian casualties several days ago. We strongly condemn any attacks against civilians. China firmly opposes the use of chemical weapons by any country, organization or person under any circumstances, and that has been its unwavering and consistent position that no one should ever distort. In Syria, there have been many instances of the use of chemicals as weapons.

China supports the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and related United Nations entities in carrying out comprehensive, objective and fair investigations into all — I repeat all — uses of chemicals as weapons. The findings of such invesitigations must be based on substantial evidence and stand the test of time and facts. It is essential to hold accountable all relevant perpetrators and responsible parties in cases involving chemical weapons.

The Syrian conflict has entered its seventh year and, to date, resulted in enormous civilian casualties. China empathetically shares in the suffering of the Syrian people, and we call on the various Syrian parties to quickly end the conflict. A political settlement is the only way out the Syrian impasse. China hopes that all the parties will create the conditions for a political settlement rather than create difficulties. It is China's hope that the international community will capitalize on the rare opportunities offered by a political settlement, persist in the general direction of a political settlement, step up its support for the United Nations as the main channel for mediation, support the work of Special Envoy of the Secretary-General De Mistura, urge the various Syrian parties to consolidate a ceasefire and build up mutual trust, adhere to the principle of a Syrian-led and owned settlement as advanced in the Geneva talks, and push for positive results to be achieved within the framework of a political settlement.

Counter-terrorism currently is the primary area of concern in connection with the Syrian issue. The international community should strengthen its cooperation, unify its working methods and resolutely fight against all the terrorist organizations listed by the Council.

Lastly, I should like to point out once again that it is totally unacceptable for the British representative to publicly distort the solemn position of another country in the Council Chamber. His logic is untenable. We hope that, on the issue of chemical weapons, on which the international community is in consensus, he will stop using the Security Council in an abusive manner for his own political purposes, as that is not in the interest of the Syrian people, and that, in the future, the British representative will refrain from such practices.

Mr. Bessho (Japan): I thank the United States presidency for convening this meeting. I also thank Under-Secretary-General Kim Won-soo for his briefing.

Japan is seriously concerned by continued reports of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, including most recently in Idlib, which reportedly led to the tragedy affecting more than 400 victims. The use of chemical weapons is not permissible and must be strongly condemned under any circumstances, and those who are responsible for their use must be identified and held accountable. I believe that there is unity inside the Security Council on those fundamental points.

In addressing the new allegations in Syria, we must first determine whether chemical weapons were actually used, and, secondly, if confirmed, we must identify those who are responsible. Taking measures to hold the perpetrators accountable is the final and indispensable step in fulfilling the Council's responsibility. Impunity is unacceptable.

In that context, Japan welcomes the fact that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic has already begun gathering information. We urge the Syrian Government and all parties in Syria to cooperate fully with the Fact-finding Mission and the Mission itself to conclude its investigations, not only in connection with the Idlib incident, but also with other recent allegations as soon as possible, so that the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism can conduct its own investigation in order to identify those responsible.

With that in mind, it is increasingly important to further improve the coordination between the two mechanisms and the Council so that we can react more swiftly to any alleged use of chemical weapons. If we are to dissuade potential actors from using them, it is crucial to show that any such use will be brought to light and that those responsible will be held accountable.

Mr. Cardi (Italy): I would first like to thank High Representative Kim Won-soo for his briefing and to express our appreciation to you, Madam President, for your leadership in navigating this year's difficult and crucial issues related to the international security architecture.

Italy is shocked by the chemical-weapon attack that is once again alleged to have been perpetrated in Syria, and by the additional bombardments of hospitals where the wounded were being treated. What happened in Khan Shaykhun is sickening and despicable, and we condemn it in the strongest possible terms, just as we would condemn the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and in any circumstances. Such attacks not only confirm the Syrian regime's utter contempt for its own people but are also a tragic reminder that international law, including Security Council resolutions and the international non-proliferation architecture, continue to be blatantly violated.

We welcome the commitment of the Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to gathering information from all available resources, and we look forward to its findings. In that regard, we supported the draft resolution (S/2017/170) submitted by the United Kingdom, the United States and France and aimed at condemning the attack and ensuring that the investigations are as effective as possible.

As long as nobody is being held accountable for these war crimes and crimes against humanity, there will still be an incentive to continue carrying them out. That is why fighting impunity, identifying the perpetrators and holding them accountable must be a shared priority for the Council, one that unifies rather than divides us. Italy encouraged action by the Security Council for ensuring the accountability of those responsible and the imposition of sanctions on them, as a follow-up to the activities of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigation Mechanism. After that pathway in the Council was blocked, on 20 March Italy backed new restrictive measures imposed by the European Union on four high-ranking Syrian military officials for their role in the use of chemical weapons against their civilian population.

Italy also supports the mechanism set up by the General Assembly to gather evidence and assist future prosecutions of crimes committed in Syria. Moreover, as a subscriber to the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency Group's code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, and to the initiative of France and Mexico on veto restraints in cases of mass atrocities, we once again reiterate our call to the Council to act. In our view, those crimes should also warrant the attention of the International Criminal Court. Indiscriminate violence against civilians continues to be seen as a tool for winning this war militarily. That approach is not only morally unacceptable, it is wrong-headed and delusional. A solution will never be found through military means, however appealing that may seem to one of the parties at the moment. The only way out of the crisis is through an inclusive political settlement, arrived at in accordance with resolution 2254 (2015), that addresses the plight and aspirations of the Syrian people and drains the quagmire of violence and instability where terrorism flourishes and endangers the whole world.

Furthermore, we should emphasize that the attacks were cynically perpetrated just at the end of the most recent round of talks in Geneva, which, under the leadership of United Nations Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura, whom we support, attempted to inject new life into the political process. The attacks cast serious new doubt on the commitment to a political solution.

The attacks also cast new doubt on the regime's willingness to abide by the terms of the ceasefire. They do not represent an isolated case but are just one of

the repeated violations of the ceasefire that have been carried out, particularly by the regime, over the past few months. Such behaviour destroys the possibility of any confidence between the parties on the ground, just as the deliberate restrictions on the provision of aid that continue to worsen an already tragic humanitarian situation have been doing. A strengthened cessation of hostilities is our best hope to move on from the military phase and ensure safe and complete humanitarian access. In that regard, and in conclusion, all of us — particularly the guarantors of the Astana process — have a special responsibility to live up to our commitments and ensure that the ceasefire is fully implemented and can thus provide a basis for a concrete political process.

Mr. Aboulatta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to start by expressing Egypt's firm condemnation of any use of chemical weapons or weapons of mass destruction by any party. We especially condemn the confirmed use of chemical weapons in more than one incident in Syria against our brothers the Syrian people, as reported by the Joint Investigative Mechanism of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations, which is responsible for investigating such incidents.

We do not understand how such crimes can continue to be ignored, with no thorough or just accountability. Egypt has therefore always affirmed the importance of holding any party responsible for such inhumane acts accountable, whatever their justification, including by the Security Council and based on agreed rules and principles and on effective evidence-gathering and investigation. In that regard, I deplore the division within the Council and our failure to come up with a resolution that can ensure accountability untainted by the politicization and polarization that have afflicted the international arena.

With regard to the reports of yesterday's sad incidents in Khan Shaykhun in Idlib, I urge all parties to cooperate closely with the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic in order to enable it to determine the facts on the ground. I call on the Mission to reach its conclusions as quickly as possible so as to enable the Joint Investigative Mechanism to conduct its activities in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions. We will therefore support any serious action in the Council to address this and other incidents and hold those responsible accountable. In that regard, we stress the importance of focusing on and addressing the issue of the production, possession and use by any non-State actors of weapons of mass destruction, which constitutes a threat to the region and the world, particularly in view of the fact that the Security Council lacks the legal instruments that could deter and address such threats.

The killing and targeting of civilians have become a painful reality that is part of the Syrian people's daily life. We are now used to hearing death and displacement in Syria spoken of in terms of figures and numbers, to be used and exploited purely for political purposes. Regrettably, after the Council had succeeded in agreeing on the parameters of a political process for addressing the threat of chemical weapons and ensuring humanitarian access in Syria, divisions and infighting within the Council — even on issues unrelated to Syria — appear to be threatening the prospects for a settlement once again. I would like to once again emphasize the importance of ensuring that the international mechanisms can investigate all war crimes committed in Syria in order to ensure accountability through a serious and honest approach.

I urge Council members to resume serious political dialogue with a view to addressing the Syrian crisis, while avoiding the atmosphere of competition, polarization and mutual blaming in the media that has characterized recent years. It is worth noting that millions of innocent civilians are paying the price, and that the people of the region will bear the brunt of this crisis for years to come.

Mr. Rosselli (Uruguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): Yesterday, as I looked at the images coming out of Khan Shaykhun, I felt physically and mentally ill. The words used by Joseph Conrad in his novel *Heart of Darkness*, and subsequently placed by Francis Ford Coppola in the mouth of Marlon Brando in his film *Apocalypse Now* — "the horror, the horror" — came to mind. That is what one perceives and feels in the face of these horrors. These are not acts of war. These are barbaric acts, and Uruguay condemns in the strongest terms yesterday's attack, which resulted in a huge loss of life, including of women and children. We saw children dying as they tried to breathe. We saw women — already dead — clutching their children. And this is not the first time because, unfortunately, we have seen these images coming out of Syria time and again.

The use of sarin gas or other nerve agent indicates that the culprits intended to cause as much damage to the residents of that area as possible. They lost their lives in horrible circumstances, choking. Once more, we are witnessing a display of a complete lack of humanity on the part of combatants in Syria. The hospital in which the wounded were being treated was bombed just a few minutes after the initial attack. That is becoming a recurring model in Syria, in Yemen, and other countries. First, civilians are attacked, and then minutes later, all those trying to aid the victims are attacked.

As Secretary-General Guterres so aptly put it yesterday, no one is winning this war. Everyone is losing it, especially the millions of Syrians who continue to see their lives destroyed on a daily basis. These horrific crimes should not and cannot remain unpunished, whoever is responsible for them. For the time being, we do not have the information that would allow us to categorically confirm who is responsible for this action. However, we need to recall that it is the primary responsibility of the Syrian Government to protect its population, and it is also the Syrian Government that has the main responsibility to provide the maximum and unhindered access to Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons experts who arrived in Syria yesterday to investigate the circumstances of the attack and to collect evidence. We hope that, unlike previous cases, the investigation will take place expeditiously and in such a way as to allow us to understand who was behind these deeds and to demand that they be held accountable for their actions.

This is not an isolated event; it occurred amid the intensified bombing and fighting of past weeks — in spite of the ceasefire that is supposed to be in effect — and the recent terrorist attacks that have also caused many deaths. All of this threatens the efforts of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Staffan de Mistura to bring the parties together to reach an intra-Syrian political solution that would make it possible to put an end to this conflict.

Unfortunately, the Security Council remains part of the problem and not part of the solution. There is little time, and with every day that passes we see an increasing number of people wounded or killed and the entire country being destroyed. The money collected during donors' pledging conference will be useless if the destruction of Syria and other countries continues. It might certainly be possible to rebuild the physical infrastructure, but it will never be possible to give life back to the thousands of innocent civilians. The total cessation of bombings and hostilities has re-emerged as a necessity.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): The position of Kazakhstan on the use of chemical weapons in Syria is consistent and well known. We strongly oppose any use of chemical weapons, as well as any other kind of weapon of mass destruction by any State organization or individual, regardless of the circumstances.

We were shocked and deeply saddened by this terrible chemical attack in Idlib, Syria. Kazakhstan strongly condemns such actions, which demonstrate the ruthless intent to destabilize the situation in the country. We wish to take this opportunity to express our heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families of the victims and to wish a speedy recovery to those injured.

Will our collective efforts to prevent further escalation of the situation in Syria, including the continued peace negotiations in Geneva, risk being undermined by such provocative actions? Any criminal behaviour that is implemented in such an inhuman way, and that pursues intimidation, must be classified as a terrorist action, which we must combat with full determination.

Kazakhstan urges the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the United Nations to immediately conduct full investigations without any delay, and to identify the perpetrators of this heinous crime. As we see, it is mainly innocent people who continue to suffer. The deliberate use by criminals to sow fear and anxiety is a characteristic method of terrorist organizations. In the light of this, we request a full and prompt investigation, which must go beyond routine procedural formalities. The Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic must directly collect evidence and make every effort to identify the perpetrators of this flagrant crime in order to bring them to justice.

Given the circumstances and proceeding from the need for a complete and unbiased disclosure of these crimes, we need comprehensive and open cooperation between the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism and the Fact-finding Mission. As a proponent of impartial and full disclosure of all chemicals crimes in Syria, Kazakhstan urges the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as other parties, to cooperate fully with the international

inspectors of the United Nations and the OPCW. Any delay in terms of disclosure or holding the perpetrators accountable demonstrates tacit agreement to continue such crimes in the future.

I thank the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Kim Won-soo, for his briefing. Yesterday's flagrant crimes in the Idlib region of Syria, as well as the ongoing potential threat of the use of chemical weapons in this country demand serious and energetic efforts. Unfortunately, as we see from the report before us (S/2017/260, annex), the critical issues that require progress to move us forward remain unchanged.

First, there is the issue of the three remaining facilities, the destruction of which still seems impossible due to the lack of the necessary security conditions. It is necessary to take urgent action to finally resolve this problem. In turn, it will help us to ensure that all official sources that raise suspicions about the storage of hazardous chemicals would no longer exist. Therefore, more active interaction is needed with the Government of Syria. In that regard we look forward to the resumption of high-level consultations with Damascus in May to address all unresolved issues related to the declaration of the Syrian Arab Republic. We expect the results of these consultations in the next report, which will outline the forthcoming steps that need to be taken.

Secondly we would like to see more dynamic and speedy measures taken by the fact-finding mission, which would help the Joint Investigative Mechanism commence investigations on new crimes.

Thirdly, the active interaction and collaboration of the Joint Investigative Mechanism with the three Security Council Committees in accordance with paragraph 4 of resolution 2319 (2016) will result in a more effective response for preventing and combating such threats. Bearing in mind that the mandate of the Mechanism is already coming to an end in November 2017, we must urgently take all measures to strengthen the work, which is necessary if it is to complete in a timely manner all pending investigations of previous crimes as well as new ones committed in Syria.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank you, Madam President, for calling this meeting with the urgency that the situation requires. I hope that the Security Council will shoulder its responsibility and act in a firm and united way in response to what we have seen.

We join other members of the Council in condemning the monstrous and cowardly attacks reported to have been carried out with chemical weapons yesterday on the people of Idlib. The pictures emerging are truly shocking. We have seen the lifeless bodies of those struck down as they went about their daily lives and the heartbreaking images of children desperately gasping for air. Our thoughts are with the families and friends of those who died and who have been injured, but there is also a sense of outrage. The attacks on the hospitals that followed are equally appalling.

The use of chemical weapons is illegal and constitutes a threat to international peace and security and can amount to war crimes or crimes against humanity. What happened in Idlib must now be investigated without delay. If the allegations are proven to be correct, then this will be a gruesome addition to the already-confirmed cases of the use of chemical weapons and other serious international crimes committed by the Syrian regime. Those responsible for the use of chemical weapons in Syria must be held accountable, as the Council agreed in resolution 2209 (2015).

In the light of what we have seen over the last 24 hours, it is important that the Council now show a united front. We must do all that is necessary to facilitate the important work of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM). Sweden therefore fully supports the draft resolution put forward this morning by the United Kingdom, France and the United States. There is an urgent need for OPCW fact-finding mission to establish the facts and report its findings as soon as possible, including to identify those responsible. In order to do so successfully, they must receive the full cooperation of the Syrian authorities.

This attack further underlines the importance of the Council's continued focus on chemical-weapons use in Syria. As we have stated before, the Syrian authorities must cooperate fully with the OPCW to allow it to verify the accuracy and completeness of the chemical-weapons declarations. This is critical for addressing the gaps, inconsistencies and discrepancies that remain.

We appreciate the work of the JIM and we welcome that it will soon be fully operational. We look forward to reports containing more information on the four previously identified cases involving Da'esh and the Syrian regime as well as the new cases, including this

most recent attack, to be presented by the OPCW Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic.

In conclusion, we will continue our efforts in the Council and elsewhere to ensure that those responsible for the heinous crimes in Syria are held accountable. Sweden has contributed to the JIM as well as to the impartial and independent mechanism mandated by the General Assembly which is now being set up. The work of the Commission of Inquiry for Syria must also continue. We have also actively supported the European Union's recent introduction of targeted sanctions on individuals implicated in the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

The attack in Idlib underlines the importance of the Security Council's work to end the use of chemical weapons. We cannot shy away from our responsibilities. We must now redouble our efforts.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): I wish to thank Mr. Kim Won-soo for his briefing. Let me take this opportunity to express my appreciation to him for his commitment and dedicated service as Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs since June 2015. I would also like to congratulate his successor, Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu.

The report of the use of chemical weapons in Idlib yesterday is indeed very shocking. What we have seen in videos and pictures is simply heartbreaking. Earlier, the representative of Uruguay expressed so eloquently what we also felt at this grievous sight. We express our profound sympathy for the victims of the attack. As we have stated before, we are concerned about continued reports of the use of chemical weapons in Syria, including the eight incidents that have been recorded since the beginning of the year. We strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons by any State or non-State actor.

The use of chemicals as weapons is unacceptable and unjustifiable under any circumstances. We agree with what the Secretary-General stated in his letter dated 27 March 2017:

> "The continuing use of toxic chemicals as weapons, as well as the use of chemical weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic, imperils the long-established norm against such weapons. There can be no lawful and impunity must be stopped by identifying and holding those responsible to account." (*S/2017/304, p. 1*)

We hope the reported attack in Idlib will be investigated by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Fact-finding Mission in the Syrian Arab Republic as effectively as possible. In this regard, we welcome the statement of the OPCW that indicated that the fact-finding mission is in the process of gathering and analysing information from all available sources. More importantly, after a proper investigation process, the perpetrators of the attack should be identified by the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) based on reliable evidence in order to ensure accountability. It is very critical that whatever action is taken by the Security Council is and appears to be based on credible evidence about which no well-meaning and objectively disposed person could have doubts.

The continued reports of chemical attacks in Syria give us additional justification for fully supporting the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. That is why it is so critical that the JIM resume its work as expeditiously as possible. Without its full operationalization, the Council would be unable to ensure accountability, which we believe is imperative for holding perpetrators to account and deterring the further use of chemical weapons. It is therefore essential to provide all necessary support for the JIM so that it could resume and conduct this investigation in a professional, independent and impartial manner.

It is not only a matter of ensuring justice to the victims of chemical-weapons attacks in Syria, but it is also about preserving the non-proliferation architecture that is a critical pillar for maintaining global peace and security. The proliferation of chemical weapons and their use including by terrorists is a source of grave concern and poses a serious threat to peace and stability in the region and beyond. Such a threat could be sustainably addressed if political and diplomatic solutions are given primacy. Only an inclusive political process could ultimately address the Syrian crisis and stop the horrible attacks, including what we are currently, from continuing to cause unspeakable suffering to the people of Syria. Without underestimating the challenges that lie ahead, we note the limited progress made in the 10th round of intra-Syrian talks, which concluded a few days ago. We look forward to the briefing by Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura next week.

In conclusion, we are inclined to vote favourably on the draft resolution proposed by the United Kingdom, the United States and France. It is our conviction that

the more united the Council is with respect to the actions that it takes on the matter, the easier the international community will find it to control the menace of the use of chemical weapons. That is why we look forward to finding common ground to ensure that there is unity within the Council so that investigations are conducted as speedily and as effectively as possible.

Mr. Yelchenko (Ukraine): First of all, I would like to thank the United Kingdom and France for requesting today's meeting, and the presidency for promptly convening it.

At the outset, let me recall the statement by the Foreign Ministry of Ukraine issued today on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria, which reiterates, inter alia, that the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere and under any circumstances is a blatant violation of international law and must be strongly condemned, and those responsible for such acts must be held accountable.

There appears to be no end to the incessant flow of reports from Syria regarding the use of toxic chemicals as weapons. A real Pandora's box was opened in 2012 and, to date, we continue to witness the grave consequences of the Syrian Government's actions and decisions, or rather the lack of them, from five years ago. The genie is out of the bottle but the international community is still undecided about what to do about it, despite the consensus that the use of chemical weapons is unjustifiable and cannot be tolerated.

The international community, including the Security Council, has been very prolific and eloquent in expressing concern and condemning the use of toxic chemicals as weapons, but that is as far as it goes. There is an astounding lack of concrete actions, and therefore the gap between talking the talk and walking the walk is only growing. Vivid images of the victims who were exposed to the poisonous gas in Idlib yesterday serve as a bold and clear wake-up call to the whole international community. They are a stark reminder to all of us as to the [illegible] that there is going to be and for any failure to act. These innocent civilians in Idlib paid the ultimate price because the Council could not get its act together on the Syrian chemical weapons issue. These children whose parents we are yesterday fight for breath and battle suffocation because of fatal decisions made in distant capitals by people preoccupied by their own power agendas.

Under the circumstances, repeating the usual mantras of "Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons investigation", "Joint Investigative Mechanism involvement", "need for the host Government's full cooperation" and so on sounds hollow and, frankly, is an affront to the people of Syria. Moreover, the Council's failure to act on the issue will create the false perception that perpetrators of that crime can hide behind the wall of lies and falsification — the hybrid wall constructed by the Al-Assad regime and secured by the Russian veto. That wall must be knocked down. My only question today is this, Where is the limit to our collective tolerance, which appears to have no boundaries? And as a follow up: How many more Idlibs will it take to finally move on this issue?

Proceeding from the Council's common position that the use of chemical weapons is a flagrant violation of international law, we believe it should act resolutely and without any delay. In that regard, Ukraine supports the draft resolution presented by the United States, the United Kingdom and France, as a balanced and focused document that introduces specific actions. We hope that this important document will be adopted by the Council today. That is the least we can do to ensure that the Idlib attack is not ignored.

Mr. Sock (Senegal) (spoke in French): My delegation would like commend France and the United Kingdom on their initiative to request today's meeting, and you, Madam President, on your decision to promptly convene the meeting to enable the Security Council to address the subject of the alleged use of poisonous substances — chemical agents and chemical weapons — yesterday, 4 April — my country's national holiday — in Khan Shaykhun, Idlib governorate. Scores were killed and hundreds suffocated, including children. The entire civilian population was affected. We express sincere condolences to the families of the victims and to our Syrian brothers and sisters. We wish the injured a speedy recovery.

I would like to congratulate [illegible] Mr. Kim Won-soo, on his clear and objective presentation and to commend him for taking the precaution, to the extent possible, of consulting with the representatives of the Syrian Government here in New York. The [illegible] issued by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is already tasked with collecting and analysing information from all available sources in order to

determine those responsible, is also concerned about proceeding with caution.

As you, Madam, recalled here on 28 February (see S/PV.7891), nothing can justify the atrocity of the use of chemical substances as weapons anywhere or at any time, including in Syria, a conflict zone, and in particular on civilian populations. That is why, staying true to its principled stance, and in its capacity as a State party to the Convention on Chemical Weapons, Senegal reiterates, through me, its firm condemnation of the use of weapons of mass destruction of all kinds — including chemical weapons — as occurred yesterday in Khan Shaykhun.

Yesterday's barbaric act in an interminable war in Syria and ongoing allegations of the use of chemical weapons in that country further illustrate the relevance of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism. In that regard, we continue to encourage the steering committee in its efforts, pursuant to resolution 2235 (2015) and 2319 (2016), to conduct objective and impartial investigations to identify those responsible for the unacceptable use of chemical substances as weapons. Ongoing consultations between the OPCW secretariat and the competent Syrian authorities are also of vital importance to ensure that the Fact-finding Mission can effectively discharge its mission.

How can we not be concerned yet again about non-State actors — terrorist groups such as Islamic State and the former Al-Nusra Front — possessing such loathsome weapons? That is why we are calling for improved cooperation among all States Members of the United Nations, in particular those of the region, to put an end to the ongoing illegal arms to extremist terrorists in Syria and beyond. Once again, my delegation calls on all the members of the Security Council to return to the spirit of consensus and cooperation that prevailed prior to the adoption of resolutions 2118 (2013) and 2319 (2016). It should be recalled that those resolutions entitled the Council to make tangible progress on the destruction of the chemical weapons production facilities declared by the Syrian Government. It is now up to the members of the Council to work together to provide follow up to the substantive findings of the investigations undertaken by the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Everyone is well aware of the complexity of the task.

In conclusion, we continue to believe that only a legitimate political solution based on the Geneva communiqué (S/2012/522, annex) and resolution 2254 (2015) will help us achieve a lasting solution to this conflict, which is having devastating humanitarian consequences, while we must also shed light on all the facts concerning the allegations of the use of prohibited weapons in Syria. My delegation therefore once again expresses its desire for the success of the fifth round of the Geneva talks, which began on 23 March, and we hope that, together with the Astana process, the talks will also strengthen the substantive findings of the fourth session, which helped us, for the first time, to get to the substantive issues, such as constitutional reform, the political transition and the holding United Nations-supervised elections.

In the interim, Senegal calls for a swift and reliable assessment of what took place in Idlib yesterday. We also call for the speedy and reliable identification of the perpetrators. As for the team of the OPCW Fact-Finding Mission for Syria, whose members are ready to start work, and that of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism, whose conclusions are pending to identify those responsible, Senegal reiterates its full support.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (spoke in Russian): We are grateful to the delegation of the United States for this opportunity for an open debate and to discuss honestly the very complex topic of the use of poisonous substances in the context of the Syrian conflict. Unfortunately, interest in such events clearly has an ideological thrust. Let us acknowledge that it is closely interwoven with the anti-Damascus campaign, which has not yet reached the place it deserves on the rubbish heap of history. Its tone as an element of realism appears, when the political process in Astana and Geneva starts to really take shape and gain speed. Just, strangely, all kinds of incidents start to occur. The last example is the tragedy in Khan Shaykun.

According to our information, the Syrian Government has requested the Technical Secretariat of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) to send a fact-finding mission to Syria to investigate the incident as well as an OPCW rapid-response and assistance mission. There is no need to repeat that the Russian Federation has always had a clear and unequivocal position on the use of chemical weapons by anyone in absolutely unacceptable and circumstances. Those guilty of committing such a crime must be held accountable.

Let us look at the origin of the problem. The watershed in the history of the use of toxic chemicals in Syria, and then of full-fledged chemical warfare agents, was the establishment of the so-called "red lines" initiated by the previous United States Administration in 2012. Crossing those red lines was supposed to have led to military intervention in the intra-Syrian conflict. That decision served as a starting point for future provocations by terrorist and extremist groups with the use of chemical weapons. They sought to discredit the official Damascus regime and to create a pretext for the use of military force against a sovereign State.

Back then, our Western partners preferred to remain silent, including regarding the request that came from Damascus in March 2013 about investigating the use of sarin by insurgents in a suburb of Aleppo, Khan al-Assal. We hope that this kind of attitude will not be repeated this time. It was such inaction that encouraged the insurgents, who felt they enjoyed impunity, to conduct their large-scale acts on 21 August 2013 in eastern Ghouta, when sarin was used again. By the way, quite coincidentally, this act was timed to coincide with the first mission to Syria of a United Nations group of experts, led by Åke Sellström. It tried to ascribe responsibility for the atrocities to Government troops, but they did not succeed in doing so because, at the time, Damascus showed sufficient good faith, and, through the efforts of the Russian Federation and the United States, with the support of the international community, it was possible to achieve a successful chemical disarmament of Syria.

When it became clear that the Government of Mr. Assad is very near the [illegible] very complex conditions of the armed conflict, unable to eliminate its chemical arsenals, we are experiencing the alleged use in Syria of chlorine as chemical weapons. The OPCW established a fact-finding mission for that chemical attack, with the support of the Government of Damascus, which was ready to duly investigate such incidents. But in fact this mission never visited the supposed sites where attacks is said to take place. And on a poor foundation raised in the work of the fact-finding Mission, and in of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (JIM) in Syria to investigate cases of use of chemical weapons in Syria, the latest known fabricated by the Syrian opposition and non-governmental organizations has report a direct alleged use of chlorine by Government forces. Its reports were taken at face value, and no one sought to conduct an objective investigation.

If anyone has any doubt that the images of the so-called use of sarin incidents, in particular in Sarmin, were staged in advance, one need only look at the videos that were filmed on that subject by certain pseudo-humanitarian non-governmental organizations, such as the White Helmets, which were praised by some in this Chamber, and by Jabhat Al-Nusra. In those videos, one sees the same "actor-correspondents". It is a fact that the White Helmets are closely linked to that terrorist organization, or perhaps those who fabricated those materials were the same persons who were exaggerating about the humanitarian catastrophe in eastern Aleppo while they were busy filling their warehouses with medication and food when the population was starving. I asked here at the United Nations, "Is that true"? They said, "Yes ,that is true. Why"? Apparently, they were getting ready for a long-term siege. Can you believe the degree of cynicism: those are the organizations that provide video materials for this, and these video materials should serve as a basis for us to draw conclusions?

The OPCW experts have confirmed that these kinds of terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and Al-Nusra, produce fully fledged weaponized chemical substances, mustard gas and sarin, which are regularly used in Syria and Iraq. By the way, the Western intelligence community also agrees with those kinds of conclusions. We have often argued our position in the Security Council regarding the preliminary outcome of investigations in the framework of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. Much still needs to be examined. That is why we agreed to extend the mandate of the Mechanism for another year. We need to conduct a thorough, depoliticized investigation of cases of the use of chemical weapons, based on reliable and verified facts. The future work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism needs to be expanded geographically. Its mandate needs to be buttressed by real anti-terrorist support, which is provided for by a Security Council resolution.

No one should seek to sow the seeds of discord between the Russian Federation and the government of Iraq and other countries of the region. We have a solid position in the Middle East. People believe us, and what we are doing is to support Baghdad and not act against it, as some affirm. There should be some bounds of propriety.

We are very concerned about the fact that certain States are already manipulating the preliminary results of the work of the Joint Investigative Mechanism. An example of this kind of i.responsible approach was the draft resolution on sanctions (S/2017/172) under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations that was put to the vote on 28 February, even while the political processes in Astana and Geneva were working very well. The aforementioned States created an absolutely artificial provocation in the Security Council without even explaining the purpose of putting the draft resolution to a vote. If the Russian and Chinese initiative had been taken seriously two years ago, including the draft resolution that we submitted, then the situation today would be radically different. But that initiative was disregarded.

To respond to the question posed by the United Kingdom as to whether Russia has a plan, the answer is yes. We have more than one plan. The first plan is to combat terrorism. The second plan relates to the draft resolution before us. At this stage, we do not see a particular need to adopt a draft resolution. Previously adopted decisions are more than sufficient to conduct a thorough investigation of the incident. But, if some of the Security Council members think that a new draft resolution is desirable or necessary, then it needs to have a completely different shape and form.

The preambular part should state that the Security Council deeply regrets the massacre of people as a result of the use chemical agents in Khan Shaykhun. It should also state that those reports dictate the need to carry out a comprehensive investigation in order to find out what happened and who is responsible. The preambular section should also condemn the use of chemical weapons by anyone. The operative part should be limited to one paragraph indicating that the OPCW Fact-finding Mission should conduct a thorough investigation of the reports on the ground, but with one important condition — the staff of the investigative Mission should be introduced to the Council and should reflect a geographical balance. There should also be a demand that illegal armed groups that control the area where the alleged chemical attack occurred, including and with access to that area and furnish all the necessary information. The main task now is to conduct an objective inquiry into what occurred.

The list of falsified reports regarding the incident have come from the previously mentioned White Helmets or the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, based in London. Those two sources have long been discredited. To take their reports at face value as a basis for making important decisions is neither professional nor prudent. At the same time, we note the contradictory character of the reports about the incident. The White Helmets are jumbling information in their reports; their versions keep changing. They refer to bombings, either from helicopters or aircraft; they mention the use of chlorine or sarin; and they constantly change the number of victims. In the videos and photos released on social media, we see the representatives of the White Helmets providing assistance to the victims while acting very unprofessionally and without any decent protective means. Also, the behaviour of the representatives of the White Helmets in extreme circumstances is very relaxed, which leads one to question the plausibility of those materials. Such actions are meant to provoke.

As a matter of fact, the aforementioned discrepancies arealso reflected in the draft resolution. The second preambular paragraph, for example, expresses the horror of what occurred — as though it were an established fact. The operative paragraph 3 states that we need to establish whether or not the event took place. Has anyone even checked what was written? In other words, this draft resolution is hasty and superficial. Let us be clear — putting forward such a text for adoption by the Security Council is simply inappropriate.

As for the incident that allegedly took place on territory that since 2014 has been under the control of terrorists from the Al-Nusra Front, it is true that on 4 April, from 11.30 to 12.30, local time, Syrian planes conducted an air strike in the eastern edge of Khan Shaykhun, on a large warehouse containing ammunition and military equipment. At that site, there was a facility for producing ammunition with toxic agents. That ammunition was for use in Iraq and Aleppo. Their use in that region was confirmed last year by Russian military experts. The symptoms of those affected in Khan Shaykhun, as shown in video footage on social networks, were the same as those who were affected last year in Aleppo, when all of the information regarding the use of those chemical substances, found in samples of soil from that city, was collected and forwarded to the OPCW, where they continue to be reviewed hesitantly.

What is clear to us is that chemical terrorism is increasing and needs to be countered as decisively as possible. Unfortunately, over the past three years, all of our attempts to get the Security Council to respond to

the crimes of terrorists who are using chemical weapons with increasing frequency have been unsuccessful due to the opposition of our Western colleagues. In typical fashion, they were completely indifferent to the recent actions of terrorists in Mosul, and that fact was confirmed by reputable and impartial international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

I now draw the Council's attention to the Secretary-General's statement. He called for a thorough inquiry into what really happened in Khan Shaykhun. We fully support that position. The investigation must be comprehensive and objective. We must put an end to the very poor practice of investigation from afar, often based on information that is posted on the Internet or taken from neighbouring countries — used even by the Fact-finding Mission. That information is questionable and very difficult to prove. Any investigative body, including the Fact-finding Mission, must actually visit the site where the alleged use of chemical weapons occurred in Syria, while using a broad range of methodologies, such as taking samples and consulting with medical and legal forensic experts. The need for such a serious and professional approach was specifically mentioned in the fourth and fifth reports of the OPCW-United Nations Joint Investigative Mechanism (see S/2016/888 and S/2017/131), in paragraphs 89 and 11, respectively.

I once again stress that the team of investigators must be truly international, in line with the principles of broad geographical representation as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. In its current form, the composition of the Fact-finding Mission in no way respects that foundational principle. The conclusions of the Fact-finding Mission cannot possibly be called impartial.

There is one other thing I would like to talk about, which is, once again, the utterly irresponsible, disrespectful, unprofessional statement by the British Ambassador. It can be explained by the fact that they are doing nothing — nothing — to normalize the situation in Syria. Actually, they are doing one thing — dumping provocative draft resolutions in the Security Council — and, by the way, openly putting unilateral pressure on the Joint Investigative Mechanism in an attempt to extract the conclusions that he needs. Just in general, Mr. Rycroft's pronouncements about China and Russia cross a diplomatic line that is simply unacceptable and must not be repeated. We are not going to sit here and listen to it any more. Better that they should tell us what Britain is doing to solve the situation in Syria. They keep asking questions of Russia and China. Do they feel any such responsibility with regard to the issue? No, they do not.

This is all about an obsession with regime change. That is what is preventing the Security Council from working constructively. It is they who are undermining the Council through their attempts to use Council decisions to give their illegitimate plans a veneer of legitimacy. But it is not working, and it will never work. It is time to change that broken record. Nor should they attempt yet again to set us against the peoples of Syria, Iraq and other nations of the Middle East. I thought that British diplomacy had long ago abandoned such crude tactics. They should think very hard about that.

I reiterate once again that we will never be able to resolve the Syrian conflict or any other global problems, including that of aggressive terrorism, without genuine united effort. We are ready to work together on that.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United States.

It was interesting to hear my Russian colleague talk about the independent investigations and their importance, because the entire Security Council decided on what the Joint Investigative Mechanism would be and what it would do, and it was actually voted on unanimously. The Joint Investigative Mechanism reported that the Syrian Government had used chemical weapons against its own people three different times. But somehow now we do not like what the Joint Investigative Mechanism does.

Having said that, I will say that in the life of the United Nations there are times when we are compelled to do more than just talk, there are times when we are compelled to take collective action. The Security Council thinks of itself as a defender of peace, security and human rights. We will not deserve that description if we do not rise to the challenge and take action today.

Yesterday morning we awoke to pictures of children foaming at the mouth and suffering convulsions being carried in the arms of desperate parents. We are victims of lifeless bodies, some still in diapers, some with the visible signs of a chemical weapon attack. I call it those pictures. We cannot close our eyes to those pictures. We cannot close our minds to the responsibility to act.

We do not yet know everything about yesterday's attack. We have an open things to be done. We

know that yesterday's attack bears all the hallmarks of the Al-Assad regime's use of chemical weapons. We know that Al-Assad has used these weapons against the Syrian people before; that was confirmed by the Council's own independent team of investigators. We know that yesterday's attack was a new low, even for the barbaric Al-Assad regime.

Evidence reported from the scene indicates that Al-Assad is now using even more lethal chemical agents than he did before. The gas that fell out of the sky yesterday was even more deadly, leaving men, women, the elderly and children gasping for their very last breath. And as first responders, doctors and nurses rushed to help the victims, a second round of bombs rained down. They died in the same slow, horrendous manner as the civilians they were trying to save.

We all also know this. Just a few weeks ago, the Council attempted to hold Al-Assad accountable for suffocating his own people to death with toxic chemicals. Russia stood in the way of ensuring such accountability. It made an unconscionable choice and chose to close its eyes to the barbarity. It defiled the conscience of the world. Russia cannot escape responsibility for this. In fact, if Russia had been fulfilling its responsibility, there would not even be any chemical weapons left for the Syrian regime to use.

There is one more thing we know. We know that if nothing is done, these attacks will continue. Al-Assad has no incentive to stop using chemical weapons so long as Russia continues to protect his regime from consequences. I implore my colleagues to take a hard look at their words in the Council. We regularly repeat tired talking points in support of a peace process that is regularly undermined by the Al-Assad regime. Time and time again, Russia uses the same false narrative to deflect attention from its allies in Damascus. Time and time again, without any factual basis, Russia attempts to place blame on others.

[illegible] There is an obvious truth here that must be spoken. The truth is that Al-Assad, Russia and Iran have no interest in peace. The illegitimate Syrian Government, led by men with no conscience, has committed untold atrocities against its people for more than six years. Al-Assad has made it clear that he does not want to take part in a meaningful political process.

Iran has reinforced Al-Assad's military, and Russia has shielded Al-Assad from United Nations sanctions. [illegible] has its influence in Syria but it seems to have, we need to see it use it. We need to see it put an end to these horrific acts. How many more children have to die before Russia cares?

The United States sees yesterday's attack as a disgrace at the highest level, an assurance that humanity means nothing to the Syrian Government. The question that the members of the Council must ask themselves is this: if we are not able to enforce resolutions preventing the use of chemical weapons, what does that say about our chances of ending the broader conflict in Syria? What does that say about our ability to bring relief to the Syrian people? If we are not able to enforce resolutions preventing the use of chemical weapons, what does that say about our effectiveness in this institution?

If we are not prepared to act, then the Council will keep meeting, month after month, to express outrage at the continuing use of chemical weapons and it will not end. We will see more conflict in Syria, we will see more pictures that we can never unsee.

I began my remarks by saying that, in the life of the United Nations, there are times when we are compelled to take collective action. I will now add this: when the United Nations consistently fails in its duty to act collectively, there are times in the life of states in which we are compelled to take our own action. For the sake of the victims, I hope that the rest of the Council is finally willing to do the same. The world needs to acknowledge the use of chemical weapons and the fact that it will not be tolerated.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. [illegible] (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Several members of the Security Council today made statements that have unequivocally further demonstrated that my country, Syria, is a victim of two simultaneous acts of aggression. The [illegible] involves the attack by the permanent members of the Council, and the second concerns the attack by proxy being carried out by armed terrorist groups in Syria on the instructions of those permanent member States of the Council. Both seem to have an appetite for falsifying and fabricating evidence. We have been witness to on practices for more than 6 years in the Council. I charge with the [illegible] using, and to illegal agents of mass destruction [illegible] Ghouta, I categorically

reject the false accusations and allegations of the Syrian Arab Army's use of toxic chemical substances against Syrian civilians in Khan Shaykhun. The latter are used as human shields by armed terrorist groups. Syria also reaffirms that the Syrian Arab Army does not possess any type of chemical weapon. We have never used them, and we never will.

My Government subscribes to the principled and firm position that eschews the use of chemical weapons and all weapons of mass destruction whatever the parties concerned, wherever, whatever the circumstance and whatever the justification. Such use constitutes a crime against humanity — an unjustifiable crime that runs contrary to all ethics. Those are the firm principles by which we stand and based upon which we joined the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). We have honoured all our obligations under the Convention on Chemical Weapons because we believe that the Middle East should be a WMD-free zone. We have demonstrated our commitment and transparency within the framework of the agreement between my country, the OPCW and the United Nations Office for Project Services.

Baseless politicized accusations have been levelled against my country and its allies in our war against terror since day one, as the media have disseminated information provided by Council-designated terrorist groups, especially in Khan Shaykhun. That confirms that certain parties represented within the Council, as well as Turkey and other countries, will continue their politicized and dangerous practices aimed at blackmailing my Government and its allies, tarnishing our reputation in our efforts to combat terror, obstructing talks in Astana and Geneva and ending all prospects for a political settlement of the crisis, even if it is at the expense of children and women who are the innocent victims of the terrorism that today threatens Syria and the rest of the world. Certain Governments are now of one voice in unjustifiably and systematically accusing Syria so as to as to send us back to square one with regard to the issue of chemical weapons and serve clear political objectives. That is an attempt to hamper the attitude of openness towards Syria that had begun to take shape only recently.

On 21 March, the head of my country's delegation to the Geneva talks expressed to Mr. De Mistura Syria's concern about reports of armed terrorist groups' possession of toxic chemicals in the rural areas of Damascus, Idlib and Hama and their potential use as weapons against civilians. He warned of fabricated and falsified evidence and any other accusation levelled against my country as was done in the past.

I would like to remind the Council that my Government has sent more than 90 letters, of which the most recent dates from several days ago, to the Council, the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1540 (2004), the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs and the OPCW Joint Investigative Mechanism. All those letters includede information documenting armed terrorist groups' — namely, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh) — possession of toxic chemicals that had been acquired via Turkish territory. We condemn the latter and find it very strange that such actions coincide with the holding of international meetings on Syria, negotiations with Syrian representatives in Astana and Geneva, and incidents in which civilians have been targeted.

That is in line with the continued cheap political exploitation by certain Member States represented in the Council through using fabricated reports disseminated by the media that have ties to certain countries' intelligence bodies. They do not rely on reason or logic, or wait to establish the facts. They do not even give a minute's thought to who is the real beneficiary of using toxic chemicals against innocent civilians. The answer is clear: the main beneficiaries are the same regimes that have targeted Syria for more than six years. They are now attempting to come to the rescue of the armed groups and the alliance of armed groups, so that they can undermine the political process in Geneva and Astana. That narrative in the Council against my country is the only explanation that accounts for the statements made by the President of the Council for the month of March when he declared that he would oppose any draft resolution introduced by the Russian Federation or China with regard to the issue of armed groups' possession of chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq.

It is quite paradoxical that France called for this meeting. On instructions from former Minister for Foreign Affairs Laurent Fabius, that country fabricated the report of the use of toxic chemicals in eastern Ghouta in August 2013, which was documented in a book by two French journalists entitled *Le Chemin de l'homme*. France, along with its accomplices, is politically, legally and ethically responsible for the illegal international coalition's role in the shelling of civilians and the destruction of infrastructure. I would

like to remind the Council of the barbaric massacre carried out by French warplanes against 200 civilians in an Aleppo village in July 2016 and the recent airs trikes by the international alliance in Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor that claimed the lives of scores of civilians and destroyed numerous bridges and infrastructure.

In conclusion, my Government categorically rejects falsified and fabricated accusations. It nevertheless reaffirms that it will continue to honour its obligations under the Convention on Chemical Weapons and in its ceaseless war against terror. We will relentlessly combat terror despite any cheap attempt to exploit the innocent blood spilled in Syria.

The meeting rose at noon.